Chaucer Studies XXXVI

The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception

Edited by CAROLYN P. COLLETTE

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CHAUCER STUDIES XXXVI

The Legend of Good Women

Context and Reception

The essays in this volume explore the context and reception of Chaucer's neglected *Legend of Good Women* from a variety of late medieval cultural perspectives, verbal, political, and social, expanding our understanding of the web of poetic and cultural conventions in which the *Legend* was created and received. Topics addressed include the manuscript and print history of the poem (explored through performance theory, and in the context of erotic courtly games played by the aristocracy); the politics of Philippa of Lancaster's role in transmitting the flower and leaf topos from French literature into English; the connections between love and polity in the *Prologue*; the influence of stories of Amazons, Thebes, and Troy; and the ludic dimensions of the *Legend*.

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The Legend of Good Women

Context and Reception

Edited by
CAROLYN P. COLLETTE

D. S. BREWER

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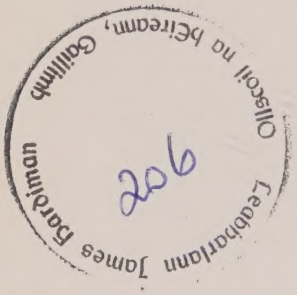

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Contents

Abbreviations vi

Introduction vii

1. The *Legend of Good Women*: Performance, Performativity, and Presentation 1
William A. Quinn

2. The Flower, the Leaf, and Philippa of Lancaster 33
Joyce Coleman

3. Ricardian Dreamwork: Chaucer, Cupid and Loyal Lovers 59
Robert R. Edwards

4. 'Olde Stories' and Amazons: The *Legend of Good Women*, the 'Knight's Tale', and Fourteenth-Century Political Culture 83
Nancy Bradley Warren

5. Remembering the Game: Debating the *Legend*'s Women 105
Betsy McCormick

6. Intention, Integrity and 'Renoun': the Public Virtue of Chaucer's Good Women 132
Simon Meecham-Jones

7. The God of Love and Love of God: Palinodic Exchange in the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* and the 'Retraction' 157
Jamie C. Fumo

8. Games Medieval Women Play 176
Nicola McDonald

Index 199

Abbreviations

EETS	Early English Text Society
ELH	*English Literary History*
E.S.	early series
ELS	*English Literary Studies*
IMEV	*Index of Middle English Verse*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
MED	*The Middle English Dictionary*
MLN	*Modern Language Notes*
MLR	*Modern Language Review*
MLQ	*Modern Language Quarterly*
MP	*Modern Philology*
NLH	*New Literary History*
O.S.	original series
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association*
SAC	*Studies in the Age of Chaucer*
SATF	*Société des anciens textes français*

Introduction

Rethinking the Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception

The *Legend of Good Women* poses a host of problems in Chaucerian criticism: it is an unfinished text, with an unstable manuscript tradition,[1] and a complicated relationship to its putative sources. Arguably Chaucer's most enigmatic poem, polysemous in its gestures and allusions to multiple social, literary, and religious systems, Chaucer's *Legend* seems either to intrigue or to annoy its modern readers – but rarely, if ever, to satisfy them. For most of the earlier twentieth century three aspects of the poem occupied critical response: the relationship and chronology of the two versions of the Prologue, the tone and genre of the exemplary tales, and the relationship of those tales to their sources. This pattern began in the early years of the century with John Livingstone Lowes' 1904 and 1905 *PMLA* articles outlining Chaucer's indebtedness in the Prologue to the French tradition of marguerite poetry and to Froissart's *Paradis d'Amour*.[2] In 1908 H.C. Goddard argued that the distance between Chaucer's sources and his own narrative versions of classical tales created a distinct and undeniable structural irony that belied Chaucer's claim to serious interest or intent in the project.[3] After them, during the first half of the twentieth century the legends languished as a subject of critical attention.[4] Not until Robert O. Payne's 1963 *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics* read the allusive philosophical breadth of the Prologue and argued its implications for understanding Chaucer's artistic imagination did critical attention re-focus on this work. Robert Frank's 1972 *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* opposed the

1 No one existing manuscript contains all the text that comprises our modern *Legend of Good Women*.

2 J.L. Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as Related to the French Marguerite Poems and to the *Filostrato*', *PMLA* 19 (1904), 593–683 and 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* Considered in Its Chronological Relations', *PMLA* 20 (1905), 794–864.

3 H.C. Goddard, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 7 (1908), 87–129; 8 (1909), 47–111.

4 Margaret Galloway argued that Chaucer composed the work for Joan of Kent, see 'Chaucer's Sovereign Lady: A Study of the Prologue to the *Legend* and Related Poems', *MLR* 33 (1938), 145–199.

then prevailing sentiment espoused by Root, Tatlock, and Lounsbury, that the poem was an undertaking imposed on Chaucer, a commission that ultimately bored the author as much as it bored modern readers. Frank argued that the imputation of boredom was mistakenly derived from confusing author and narrator, and that Chaucer's 'restless versatility' was leading him to explore the possibilities of narrative, a form he would employ masterfully in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Following Frank and Payne, a number of scholars offered nuanced, broadly-based, book-length interpretations of the poem. Lisa Kiser's *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women*[5] maintained that Chaucer's project in the poem was to 'create new and suitable vehicles' for the transmission of wisdom bequeathed from the past, a project that led to the dynamic tension of framing classical stories within the medieval Christian hagiographical genre and its discourses. Donald Rowe, in *Through Nature to Eternity: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*,[6] asserts that the poem limns an ideal and androgynous concept of virtue founded on justice and pity that aims to 'undo the fall.' Sheila Delany's *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*[7] directs attention to the rich semantic field of allusion and reference that constitutes the poem; she reads the prologue and tales against multiple contexts, Wycliffite, orientalist, Augstinian, emphasizing their ironic and at times comic dissonance, while arguing in her conclusion for further research into the multiple 'Ovids' available in Chaucer's culture. In *Chaucer's Rehersyngs: the Performability of the Legend of Good Women*,[8] William Quinn focuses attention on the tonal and textual differences between the F and G Prologues, arguing for the primacy of F, a spoken text created for performance before a court audience. Most recently Florence Percival's *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*[9] places the poem within the tradition of humorous anti-feminist/pro-feminist debate, a tradition both courtly and scholarly.[10]

Even more recently a number of articles seeking to move the discussion of the poem beyond the shadow of its likely sources have offered fresh avenues for approaching the poem. Carol Meale's 'Legends of Good Women in the European Middle Ages'[11] considers the poem within the crucial context of contemporary collections of stories of famous women, notably those by Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio, concluding that Chaucer's movement from

5 (Ithaca, 1983).
6 (Lincoln, NB, 1988).
7 (Berkeley, 1994).
8 (Washington, DC, 1994).
9 (Cambridge, 1998).
10 John Fyler's *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven, 1979), although not directly about the poem is an often cited and valuable study.
11 *Archiv fur das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 229 (1992), 55–70.

Criseyde to Alceste was a 'retreat into convention and stereotype'.[12] Janet Cowen's codicologically informed reading of the structure and tone of the legends in 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*: Structure and Tone'[13] is another compelling attempt to engage with the artistic texture of the work, as it calls attention to its 'variations in tone and . . . shifting point of view . . . variety of literary conventions' (435). Richard Green's 1988 'Chaucer's Victimized Women'[14] places the patterns of betrayal central to the plot of the legends within the larger context of troth and pledge in Chaucer's world. Nicola MacDonald's recent *Chaucer Review* article, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Ladies at Court, and the Female Reader',[15] shows what critical insights about audience can come of careful analytic reading of historical sources and contemporary manuscripts.

Ironically feminist criticism has had limited success in opening up this text to new readings, perhaps because the theme of victimization so strongly structures the narratives that critics seem forced to fall back on stereotypical paradigms of weak women and predatory, controlling males, echoing formulations such as Carolyn Dinshaw's observation that, 'Passive weak women, weak martyrs of love, thus populate the *Legend*, and we witness in these tales not only the suppression of female characters in the making of individual narratives but the appropriate and exclusionary processes of masculine literary tradition in its entirety.'[16] Elaine Hansen has written on the feminization of men in the legends; arguing that the 'subject of the *Legend of Good Women* is male homosocial desire'[17] which, played out in conjunction with heterosexual desire, places men in 'the more or less feminine position – vulnerable, submissive, subservient, and self-sacrificing, on the one hand; crafty and duplicitous, on the other. . . .'[18]

But the victimization of loyal women at the hands of crafty and duplicitous men is the central thematic point Alceste insists upon in her directive (LGW, F 475f), and Chaucer seems to follow her direction slavishly. Given this fact, it might be useful to pay attention to the line of thinking laid out by the author to realize Alceste's command. She is the key to understanding the entire project, a fact made particularly clear in the G Prologue where the *balade* erases the nameless lady of the F version in favor of Alceste as the woman who *disteyns* all other female virtue and of whom the God of Love

12 Meale, 'Legends of Good Women', p. 70.
13 *Studies in Philology* 82 (1985), 416–36.
14 *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 10 (1988), 3–21.
15 *Chaucer Review* 35 (2000), 22–42.
16 C. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989), p. 75.
17 E.T. Hansen, 'The Feminization of Men in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville, TN, 1989), pp. 51–70, at p. 55.
18 Hansen, 'The Feminization of Men', p. 56.

says, 'calandier is she/Of goodnesse, for she taughte of fyn lovynge,/And namely of wifhod the lyvynge' (LGW G, 533–35; F, 'she taught al the craft of fyn lovynge, /And namely of wyfhod the lyvynge' (544–45).[19] Alceste's mediation and her relationship to the God of Love exemplify contemporary Anglo-French cultural expectations of women's roles as mediators and counselors that made the *Melibee* so popular at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries.[20] Surely it is not coincidental that the God of Love responds to Alceste's mediation, 'Al lyeth in yow, dooth with hym what yow leste,' much as at the end of the *Tale of Melibee* Melibee responds to Prudence: he found his 'herte gan enclyne to the wil of his wife . . .' and he 'conformed hym anon and assented full to werken after hir counsel' (*Melibee*, c. 1875). And certainly Chaucer's recurrent use of the term *wyfhod* in the lines cited above, as well as in the legends of Cleopatra (691), Lucrece (1687), Procne (2269) and Hypermnestra (2587)[21] directs attention to a central question of the *Legend*, what does Chaucer mean by 'good' women? What is the essential notion of female goodness that he celebrates or problematizes? The recurrence of *wyfhod* opens the possibility that one of his purposes in the *Legend* is to define ideal female behavior in a social arena. Rejecting the counsels of virginity of an earlier age, he looks to the Classics for stories of faithful women acting publically, literally putting their bodies and their lives at risk for some principle or some person, out of a matrix of desire and resistance to authority. His heroines are not cloistered virgins, but women who live public lives and whose lives and life decisions are interwoven with the fates of kingdoms. Dido, Cleopatra, and Phyllis are all queens. Ariadne and Phaedra act in hope of being duchesses or queens in Athens (LGW F 2127–29). Lucrece's personal tragedy is interwoven with Roman civic virtue. This public dimension of ideal female behavior associated with *womanhede* (LGW F 297) and *wifhod*, illustrated by stories from the Classics, combined with the discourses of courtly love and hagiography, create a tenuous and unstable field of narrative and meaning. Apparently irresolute in its purpose, disproportionate and ultimately un-unified in its construction – despite its relentless thematic focus on betrayal – the poem exhibits signs of stress arising from the yoking of two value systems. In France and Italy civic humanism would eventually grow out of the melding of Christianity and classicism, just as a notion of *womanhede* would emerge that focuses on

[19] All citations of Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. L.D. Benson (Boston, 1987).

[20] On this see David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 212f and Carolyn Collette, 'Heeding the Counsel of Prudence: a Context for the Melibee', *Chaucer Review* 29 (1995), 337–49.

[21] See his similar thematic use of *womahede* in the *Clerk's Tale* when Walter announces to Griselda that his testing was all to probe and assay her *womanhede*, 239, 1075.

women's strengths and constancy in relationships beyond the sexual, as well as on how women's virtue can enable or imperil politics. Interest in courtly heroines like Criseyde gives way to interest in women like Alceste and Griselda, strong women whose constancy is manifest not only in chaste love but also in matters of troth and will that affect wider realm of public relationships.[22] But Chaucer's *Legend*, a poem written on the cusp of this change, remains a site of struggle and accommodation where attitudes toward literature, the classics, and women are all in play. At the end of the fourteenth century Chaucer's French contemporaries were creating a literature that built on the power of the good woman as constant wife. Chaucer, too, moved to telling tales of the importance of constancy in social relationships – Custance, Griselda, Prudence, and Cecilia limn a new paradigm he was moving toward even while he abandoned the *Legend*.

Virtually all critics who undertake to explicate the poem address Chaucer's selective choice of details, plot, and characterization from his sources, often treating his excisions and compressions as idiosyncratic. In fact Chaucer is not alone in this mode of adaptive selectivity. On the matter of translation, transmission and transformation of stories it is useful to look not only to sources but also more closely and more systematically at how Chaucer's contemporaries told the same stories. Chaucer has been assumed to have written for an audience that would have realized how he had transformed, abbreviated and ironized his classical sources. While it is not at all certain that this would have been the case for a court, as opposed to a chancery-centered literary audience, it is also true that he lived in a culture which treated sources quite freely. As a result many in his audience may well have known multiple, different versions of the stories he tells. *Mouvance* was a characteristic feature of the transmission of these classical tales of women. Boccaccio, stressing Dido's faithful widowhood in his *Famous Women*, confines his narrative to her political wisdom and accomplishments in building Carthage, concluding with her suicide undertaken both for the good of Carthage and to defend her chaste widowhood – he assures his reader that she never even saw Aeneas.[23] In the *City of Ladies* Christine de Pizan cites Medea as a woman of learning, not as the murdering witch that Boccaccio describes in *Famous Women*, or the betrayed adorer of Jason's beauty and charm in Chaucer's *Legend*, but as a strong woman of action and agency.

22 On the matter of the shift in French literary focus to the subject of the good woman and Chaucer's adaptation of this theme see Carolyn Collette, 'Chaucer and the French Tradition Revisited: Philippe de Mézières and the Good Wife', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. (Turnhout, Belgium, 2000), pp. 151-68, especially citations of work of Joël Blanchard, Daniel Poirion, and Eric Hicks, *passim*.

23 See *Giovanni Boccaccio: Famous Women*, ed. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 174/175.

Deschamps invokes Medea in his *Balade* 482, comparing his lady's beauty to hers and unapologetically placing Medea in the stanzaic company of Mary, Flora, Marguerite, and Aurora:

> Marie en grace et en humilité
> En doulx maintien et en gent corps Flora,
> Marguerite en coulour et purté,
> Pure estiolle, clere comme Aurora,
> Desirée trop plus que Medea[24]

Rethinking the stories of the *Legend of Good Women*, and the implications of Chaucer's versions, means reading him within this wider context of late medieval interest both in exemplary stories about women and in the ways that old stories can be appropriated, shaped and adapted to cultural uses – all subjects addressed in the pages that follow.

This volume brings together a variety of approaches to the poem centered in the subjects of historical context and critical reception. Written in isolation from one another, the essays here nevertheless comprise a highly integrated body of work whose themes and examples echo and reinforce one another. William Quinn's essay begins this volume by addressing the most fundamental issues in reading and dealing with the poem, its manuscript and print history. Using performance theory to show the radical fluidity of the poetic site we call 'the' *Legend of Good Women*, he raises important questions about revision in a manuscript culture, intention, communal reception and private response. The poem most of us read is presented to us in a tangible, indeed static, form that belies the fluidity of its original circulation. No one manuscript contains all of what we encounter in print as the poem. The poem existed in a number of sites, in conjunction with other poems, each appearance constituting a new performance, as it were, a new witness, a separate instantiation of the fact of its existence. The variability of the poem's appearance in medieval manuscripts conflicts with the reification it achieves (suffers?) in print form. In a computer age where, not without a certain irony, technology allows us to create texts as if we were commissioning manuscripts in a medieval scriptorium, modern critics are increasingly sensitive to the impositions of editorial judgment on the reading experience. The print history of the F and G prologues, which Quinn addresses at some length, is a case in point; one witness of the G prologue has been elevated through print to a status equal to the F version which appears in many more manuscripts. The manuscript history of the poem, too, hints at its various receptions and

[24] *Oeuvres Complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, 11 vols, vol. 10, part 3 (Paris, 1882), pp. 303–4.

ultimately the diverse ways in which it was understood in the culture that received it just after Chaucer.

Joyce Coleman's 'The Flower, the Leaf, and Philippa of Lancaster' demonstrates the literary influence of women of the court both as audience and authorizing patrons, as it argues convincingly for Philippa's direct role in shaping the English flower and leaf fashion in Richard's court. Through a careful reading of primary sources, Coleman shows how active and important Philippa was in literary patronage. More important, by reading the records of her various marriage negotiations and by careful attention to the seeming minutiae of dates and shifts in such negotiations she has constructed a strong argument that Philippa, a proposed bride for Charles VI of France during the months between September 1384 and April 1385, was also the recipient of a Deschamps *balade* (*balade* 765) celebrating her as a 'flower fit for a king' in the discourse that would become the flower and leaf convention in English. Coleman's attention to Philippa's role in translation and transmittal of literature when she became queen of Portugal supports her contention that it may well have been she who shared the *balade* with others at her cousin Richard's court, and that the hypothetical line of male to male transference of literary materials may well be more a modern fiction than a Ricardian fact. Her essay opens the door to imagining the collaborative and social dimensions of literary production in Chaucer's world. Coleman's argument works, too, to help delineate the possible female audience for Chaucer's work, complementing work already done by Nicola McDonald, showing the literary sophistication of that female audience who included women like Philippa and Queen Anne who were multi-lingual and well-educated. Her work, too, opens the way to understanding the active, rather than passive functions of Chaucer's audience, both male and female.

In 'Ricardian Dreamwork: Chaucer, Cupid, and Loyal Lovers', Robert Edwards reads the Prologue as a site of private and public strivings, a site of 'making and revising meaning in late-medieval England'.[25] Following Freud he reads the Prologue(s) to the *Legend* as expressions of cultural desire recoverable not by reading through their symbols and tropes to meaning, but by analyzing the relational patterns they configure. Beginning with the premise that love constitutes a spectrum of relationships as well as the matrix in which those relationships have meaning and purpose, he reads the political as the erotic. He models a sophisticated and nuanced approach to the text by reading the prologues against one another and the climate of suspicion that shaded a court and the chronicle record of its actions. Women's fidelity is revealed as both exemplary and threatening, for the excisions and elisions Chaucer performs on his sources and in his narratives hint at the existence of

25 See his essay below, p. 61.

resistance and perfidy written into the chronicle records of the time as well as into the models of constancy and faithfulness that comprise the poem.

The theme of the hidden threat present in its absence figures prominently, too, in Nancy Bradley Warren's ' "Olde Stories" and Amazons: The *Legend of Good Women*, the *Knight's Tale*, and Fourteenth-Century Political Culture' as she reads the legends against Chaucer's other texts and in so doing lays out the shadowy but haunting theme of Thebes that recurs so often in Chaucer's constructions of the mythological past. The Amazonian connections of so many of Chaucer's heroines and female protagonists, including Alceste, call into question the simple narrative structure of tales of good women. Warren's recovery of the Amazonian connection uniting the *Legend*'s heroines focuses modern attention on the role of the female in a male dominated world, and once more raises the deconstructive–semiotic conundrum: in a world of complex signs with multiple referents and interpretants, the invocation of any one or any one 'set' of referents and interpretants, particularly the notion of the 'good' in these women, must inevitably call forth a spectrum of referents and interpretants available, but unsolicited by the particular textual purposes of the moment.[26] Here the role of the reader functions to supplement the text and its linear exposition. Warren's work richly re-creates a particular semiotic field of which many of Chaucer's audience would have had some knowledge. When she links the Amazon theme of the legends and Chaucer's larger interest in that theme in his works as a whole to the politics of Richard's court, she cites Maidstone's famous description of Anne and her ladies in the *Concordia*, 'Very beautiful herself, she stands surrounded by beautiful maidens; the New Troy conquers under these Amazons.'[27] The unstable praise and fundamentally indeterminate meaning of this description, written at approximately the same time as Chaucer is thought to have been revising the Prologue, 1393–95, helps mark the indeterminacy of the *Legend*'s 'moral' as product of a similar literary culture.

The existence of the shadow/sub-text of history and mythology that modern critics assume was interwoven with the narrative line of the *Legend* has historically been read as a complicating factor in understanding authorial intention. Betsy McCormick's essay, 'Remembering the Game: Debating the *Legend*'s Women', develops a line of thinking that presents Chaucer's compressed narratives within the tradition of the debate 'game' about the nature of women, and focuses on the role of the audience in creating meaning. Unlike Florence Percival's exposition of the *Legend* as a game as *jeu*, a

[26] On this process of collaborative reading, see James Simpson's 'Ethics and Interpretation: Reading Wills in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', SAC, 20 (1998), 73–100, where Simpson develops the topic of readerly desire within a context of late fourteenth-century 'theory' about the differences between texts that can be aligned with doctrines of charity and those that cannot, which remain literally 'figurative'.

[27] See her essay below, p. 103.

courtly past-time, this exposition of game begins with the modern theoretical background of game and play as sites in which important cultural work is performed within well-defined intellectual 'spaces' and according to well-known rules. The purpose of such cultural games, particularly in the medieval period, is ethical: a means of encountering, defining, and dealing with cultural anxiety or values. Individual experience in the 'game' thus becomes part of the wider cultural memory, often incorporated into cultural norms and values. McCormick shows how malleable the elements of the 'nature of women' game were; the same examples could be used to prove women good, or 'bad'. But the purpose of the game was to enlist the reader in assimilating, comparing, accepting and rejecting, in effect in creating and defining what is ethical. In the case of the *Legend* the ethical dimensions of the game expect that a reader will be an active, rather than a passive reader; they also turn modern criticism of the hovering presence of absent details, events and moral judgments in Chaucer's text, on its head. The implication of reading the *Legend* as part of a serious game designed to recognize and formulate ideal values implies that what modern readers may see as missing in the text medieval readers expected would be brought to the text. In the case of the *Legend* the implied question for medieval as for modern readers centered in the definition of a 'good' woman.[28]

Simon Meecham-Jones addresses the standards by which a medieval reader or author might have understood and judged the virtue demonstrated by Chaucer's nine heroines, examining the subject of integrity from both a medieval and a classical perspective. Like McCormick and Quinn, he assumes that the text is the site in which the 'reader must judge where the truth lies between bad faith and bad performance',[29] the two distinct charges Cupid and Alceste bring against Chaucer in the Prologue. Meecham-Jones links Chaucer's undertaking in writing the poem to the ethical instability of the reputations of the heroines it celebrates, arguing that Chaucer rejects poetry as a vehicle for ethical certainty. Focusing on the legends as narratives, that is sites of knowing (*narrative*, akin to Lt *cognoscere*, to know) he raises a provocative series of ideas about intention and intentionality, public and private virtue. The radical ignorance that separates the meaning of an action in its performance from the meaning generated by its perception, the impossibility of knowing another's heart, and the inevitable centrality of the self as ego even in moments of sacrifice, raise the question of shifting definitions of 'goodness' across cultures. The good may be the performance of culturally approved actions, or it may be the inner conviction of moral certitude privately held. Both value systems appear in the *Legend*, and the imperfect

28 Simpson addresses the ethical dimensions of reading in the article cited above; see p. 75.

29 See his essay below, p. 133.

melding of the two underlies the uneasy tension, the mannerist sense of the forced yoking of different literary traditions and ethical systems that characterizes the poem.

Chaucer's own intentions, manifest in his palinodic impulse, to recall, revisit and thus reinscribe his work are the subject of Jamie Fumo's essay 'The God of Love and Love of God: Palinodic Exchange in the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* and the "Retraction" ' in which Chaucer's authorial intention is examined both in itself and in relationship to his audience's ability to re-shape and re-define authorial intention in the process of reception. Reading the retraction at the end of the *Tales* against the Prologue(s) to the *Legend*, Fumo argues that 'tongue-in-cheek craftedness'[30] of the earlier moment of Cupid's and Alceste's response to Chaucer's work and the imposition of penance undermines the later retraction. The degree to which the literary gesture of retraction, not unique to Chaucer, is a gesture by which an author controls or acknowledges the instability of poetic form and the variability of inferential responses to any artistic work leads to the wider question of authorial responsibility in a culture that posits God as the ultimate author, of literature and of love. Fumo reads Chaucer's retraction and palinodic impulse in the *Legend* against the ending of the *Troilus* where Chaucer presents himself and his art to his audience, to the literary tradition he seeks to join, and before God. While the sincerity, the poetic authenticity of that moment, resonates in the canon of Chaucer's work, it serves within the context of the *Legend* which followed it to fix the God of Love as an oppressive rather than inspirational partner in creation. More ominously, the God of Love's misunderstanding of Chaucer's *entente* in writing the *Troilus* opens the way to reading Chaucer's anxiety in the *Retraction* as an anxiety not just about reader reception, but about God's knowledge of his true intention. Fumo's work on Chaucer's palinodic impulse thus raises questions similar to those Meecham-Jones' essay raises, but in a different context; for Fumo the question is not so much knowing the heroines' intentions and through that knowledge arriving at certain knowledge of their virtue by the path of narrative, but of the ultimate uncertainty that inheres both in textual creation and reception. Given the nature of these uncertainties we begin to question the existence, indeed the theoretical possibility, of exemplary literature. Perhaps Chaucer began to do so, too.

Nicola McDonald's essay, 'Games Medieval Women Play', concludes the volume by opening up an entirely new way of thinking about women and game. Her focus is the company Chaucer's *Legend* keeps in manuscripts where it appears in proximity to a variety of ludic diversions and *jeux de société* that testify to a flourishing tradition of erotically-charged games and literature designed for courtly and gentry women's entertainment.

30 See her essay below, p. 163.

McDonald's research suggests a rich, dynamic context in which to think of the *Legend* as it was received in late fourteenth-century courtly culture and as it continued to be read and valued for the next century, appearing in conjunction with a series of social games, overtly suggestive in their verbal play and designed to perform important cultural work by sanctioning both the erotic imagination and celebration of the body in its capacity for pleasure and delight. Revisiting previous themes that appear throughout this volume – the importance of manuscript study, of the concept of game in medieval culture, late medieval Anglo-French acceptance of the polyvalence of language and of tropes, the role of women in literary preservation and transmission – McDonald's research 'challenges at every turn the orthodoxies, medieval as well as modern, that inform our stereotypes of medieval women'.[31] The net result of her extensive research and compelling exposition is a challenge to re-think the *Legend* in its context and its reception, and to re-think our critical approaches to it. In many respects men have dominated critical approaches to the narratives which almost invariably open with men and their situations, turn on the various ways in which men can and do betray, abandon, destroy women, usually for reasons of state, or almost as often, for reasons of lust.[32] As Carolyn Dinshaw has said, 'It can't be denied that the motive power of this series is masculine.'[33] McDonald's work encourages us to imagine the *Legend*'s audience as women whose tastes, ranging through a spectrum of diversions, are preserved in manuscripts. Like Joyce Coleman's essay on Philippa of Lancaster, McDonald's essay opens the way to re-thinking long-accepted, gendered paradigms of reading, transmission, and reception.

In her article on the feminization of men in the *Legend*, Elaine Tuttle Hansen begins by citing Hans Robert Jauss: 'the tradition of art presupposes a dialogue between the present and the past, according to which a past work cannot answer and speak to us until a present observer has posed the question which returns it from its retirement.'[34] Often the questions that invite a text to return from retirement articulate communal interests. Thus it is no accident that so many of the essays in this volume seek to address the instability of the *Legend of Good Women* both as text and as sign system by reading the poem from different cultural perspectives. In the community of Chaucer

31 See her essay below, p. 179.

32 Chaucer may number among the men who betray women because of the way that he takes over his heroines voices, truncating and shaping their own self-presentation in the *Heroides*, replacing their experience with his shaping vision.

33 Dinshaw, *Sexual Politics*, p. 87. See also P.L. Allen, 'Reading Chaucer's Good Women', *Chaucer Review* 21 (1987), 419–34.

34 Hansen, 'The Feminization of Men', p. 52. Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 11–41, at p. 27.

criticism it is clear that the *Legend of Good Women* is being called back by a generation of critics whose interests lie in penetrating the opacity of its complex semiotic systems and semantic field, explicating its rich complexity within a variety of contexts, verbal, traditional, political, and social. The great challenge this project poses is that of recovering the complex webs of relationships that constitute the matrix in which literature makes meaning in a distant age, without recourse to assumptions that what seems odd or strange in the poem signals a moment of irony or satire. In this on-going project this volume of essays is the record of a critical moment, the preservation of one Jaussian dialogue of present and past.

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1

The *Legend of Good Women*: Performance, Performativity, and Presentation

WILLIAM A. QUINN

'I read, before my eyelids dropt their shade,
"*The Legend of Good Women*", long ago
Sung by the morning star of song . . .'
Alfred, Lord Tennyson 'A Dream of Fair Women'

What is the Legend of Good Women*?*

Like an unwanted stepdaughter, the *Legend of Good Women* commands critical attention primarily when she causes trouble. Although much controversy has focused on its two distinct Prologues, relatively few critics have analyzed the *Legend* as a whole. Robert Worth Frank, Jr. (1972) first dared to applaud the literary merits of the nine surviving legends themselves.[1] Yet the majority of Chaucerians still seem unready to concede Frank's two primary contentions: that the extant *Legend of Good Women* is essentially complete, and that most of its nine legends are individually successful short narratives. Robert O. Payne and Lisa Kiser promoted the *Legend* as a major shift in Chaucer's poetic consciousness.[2] Subsequently, the *Legend* attracted many more sophisticated (because less dismissive) inquiries. By the late 1980s, Sheila Delany and John Ganim predicted (and thereby invited) the advent of renewed appreciations of the *Legend* in terms of a variety of theory-driven readings.[3] A rapidly increasing number of Chaucerians are now eager to

1 Robert Worth Frank, Jr., *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Cambridge, MA, 1972); see, too, 'The Legend of the *Legend of Good Women*', *Chaucer Review* 1 (1966), 110–33.

2 Robert O. Payne, *The Key of Remembrance* (New Haven, 1973); Payne famously dismissed the legends themselves as 'more or less unrelieved failures' (p. 111). Lisa J. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales* (Ithaca, 1983) and *Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry* (Hanover, 1991).

3 Sheila Delany began her review *MLQ* 49 (1988), 73–76, of Donald W. Rowe's *Through*

puzzle over the *Legend* as a critical enigma. Feminist criticism in particular has generated more widespread interest in the *Legend* as the Cinderella among Chaucer's poetic achievements. But there is surprisingly little confidence regarding what comprises an appropriate way to read 'the' *Legend*.

More recent criticism has necessarily been circumscribed by A.S.G. Edwards' and M.C.E. Shaner's edition of the *Legend of Good Women* for *The Riverside Chaucer* because this corrected reading offers the best available construct of the *Legend*. The priority of the F-version is now generally accepted.[4] The surviving nine legends are as generally considered parts of an incomplete but stable sequence.[5] The majority of Chaucerians think this publication provides a definitive *Legend*.[6] Yet, this *Legend* remains an informed reconstruction, or a hypothetical best reading, or a working fiction.

Nature to Eternity with the observation *cum* prediction that 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* appears to be a poem whose time has come' (p. 73). John Ganim's review essay, 'Chaucerian Performance', *Envoi* 1 (1989), 267–75, evaluates in particular recent performance-based readings of Chaucer.

4 Paul G. Ruggiers, ed. *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition* (Norman, OK, 1984) offers a collection of essays that survey the monuments of textual criticism from William Caxton to F.N. Robinson. Charles Moorman, 'One Hundred Years of Editing the Canterbury Tales', *Chaucer Review* 24 (1989), 99–114, provides an overview of significantly diverse editorial philosophies.

5 Most critics now read the nine legends as a series of mutually illuminating episodes. In *Chaucer's Legend of Good Women: The Character and Relations of the Manuscripts, the Prologues, Some Doubtful Readings* (London, 1902; rpt New York, 1972), J.B. Bilderbeck argued that the relative stability of the order of the legends in the manuscripts 'affords a strong presumption that the order in which the legends have come down to us is the order which Chaucer gave them. The order is presumably that in which they were written' (p. 74). Bilderbeck (whose argument for Gg as the original version was persuasively refuted by J.L. Lowes) proposed that Chaucer began the program of the *Legend* under commission in 1385 (when Queen Anne was 19) and presented the Prologue and legend of Cleopatra together first and then one legend a year till the Queen's death in 1394 (p. 89). Reading the extant legends of 'the' *Legend* as annual installments promotes more discrete interpretations of each text than a seriatim reading.

6 Unless otherwise noted, all citations of *Chaucer* are taken from Larry D. Benson *et al.*, eds, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Boston, 1987). In their 'Textual Notes' to this standard edition of 'the' *Legend*, A.S.G. Edwards and M.C.E. Shaner observe: 'Because of the fragmentary nature of many of the manuscripts, the fact that at least some of the legends circulated separately, and the likelihood of contamination, particularly among the later manuscripts, the exact relations of the manuscripts are obscure' (p. 1178). Since no perfectly reliable *alpha*-text of the *Legend of Good Women* can now be reconstructed on the basis of its extant witnesses, it is more than just theoretically problematic to propose that a modern reading of the *Legend* might achieve some objective retrieval of Chaucer's authorial intent on the basis of 'the text itself'. More generally, the authority of a critical text – that is, the very concept of a definitive reading – has been destabilized by the several recent codicological studies that propose the possibility of reading individual manuscripts primarily as the interpretive property of particular readerships. See especially Derek Pearsall, ed., *Manuscripts and Readers in*

Readings of 'the' *Legend* that attempt to detail this text's actual performance features exploit a long-held critical assumption – namely, that Chaucer himself once actually recited some proto-version of the *Legend of Good Women* in court. Such a histrionic and so amateurish interpretation of the *Legend* challenges more scholarly and so more restrained interpretations of the edited text in two paradoxically contrary ways. In theory, such a conception of the *Legend* as an inherently theatrical script, one which may on the basis of internal evidence alone be orally realized again, seems far too destabilizing, too free of the text-restricted protocols that guide more conventional readings of such a narrative poem as a verse fiction or a proto-novel, rather than as a verse play. In practice, however, any specific interpretation of the *Legend* that claims to represent the tonal and thematic nuances of Chaucer's own reading seems too determinant, too critically exclusive because too explicit as a restrictive enactment of one of the surface text's multiple implications and ambiguities.[7] Retrieval of 'the' *Legend* based upon the interpretive premise of 'Chaucer's actual recital', therefore, proves no less chimerical than pursuit of his 'authorial intent', and no more so.[8]

By conceding the caveats to be maintained on the basis of such *a priori* critical skepticism, I would like to explore the converse ramifications of the idea that there is nothing special about a *performance*-based reading of the *Legend of Good Women* because, in one sense or another, all readings of 'the' *Legend* have been and will remain in some sense *performance*-based. Every

Fifteenth-Century England (Cambridge, 1983), *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature* (Cambridge, 1987), and 'Texts, Textual Criticism, and Fifteenth-Century Manuscript Production', in Robert F. Yeager, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Studies* (Hamden, CT, 1984), pp. 121–36; Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1985); and Ralph Hanna III, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Stanford, 1996).

7 See Beryl Rowland, 'Chaucer's Speaking Voice and Its Effects on His Listeners' Perception of Criseyde', *English Studies in Canada* 7 (1981), 129–40, and '*Pronuntiatio* and its Effect on Chaucer's Audience', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 4 (1982), 33–51. Alan Gaylord is, however, very skeptical of the interpretive play available to modern rhetorical enactment in 'Reading Chaucer: What's Allowed in Aloud?' *Chaucer Yearbook* 1 (1992), 87–107.

8 For considerations of how an author's anticipation of presentation significantly affects compositional intent, the analogies between Chaucer's and Ovid's respective self-imaginings of the performance event are especially provocative. In *A Discourse of Wonders: Audience and Performance in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Philadelphia, 1999), Stephen M. Wheeler applies structuralist narratology to determine 'levels of audience' and the interplay between Ovid's anticipation of actual recital for communal reception and the textual fiction of a narrative presence. In 'Reading Ovid's Rapes', Amy Richlin observes, 'So can it be said that Ovid empathizes with his rape victims? Certainly – as a great *pantomimus* but not with any but . . . a very temporary taking on their experience', in Amy Richlin, ed., *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York, 1992), pp. 158–179, at p. 176.

publication of a text of the *Legend of Good Women* in fact posits some interpretive prelude to reading – the product of a professional reader, or *alter*-Chaucer. In this most general sense, any reading of the *Legend* is in fact a performance, though silent reading tends to elide the process of interpretive intercession.

Every reading of the *Legend of Good Women* presumes both an anticipated medium of publication and a targeted, primary readership. For example, a now dominant understanding of Chaucer's readership, based mainly on fifteenth-century inventories of *The Canterbury Tales*, anticipates a bourgeois male response to circulating manuscript compilations or pamphlets.[9] But the F-Prologue of the *Legend* suggests that Chaucer originally addressed Queen Anne and her attendants on a series of occasions. Any attempt to retrieve Chaucer's own reading of the *Legend* so defined violates the interpretive protocols of two otherwise completely contrary coteries of entrenched critical thought: those that maintain the evidentiary sufficiency of 'the text itself', and those that assume the indeterminacy of every self-referential text.

In order to license future performance-based readings of the *Legend* in particular (and by analogy Chaucer's other dream visions as well), I would like to reconsider the underlying assumption that there exists a radical critical distinction between interpreting the inherent performability of the *Legend* and conventional reading of its text(s). After considering several complementary (though non-intersecting) conceptions of the term 'to perform' (the *ars theoretica* of textual presentation), I would like to reassess the performance features of the *Legend* as it has been presented in eight of its surviving manuscripts and in its major print editions (the *ars practica* of publication as performance). I hope to indicate thereby how these acts of presentation impose several fundamentally different interpretive assumptions upon each *Legend*'s readers as witnesses to various types of performance.

The most fundamental controversy regarding the present plurality or instability or freedom or chaos of ways to read the *Legend* remains a century-old critical impasse regarding its intended sincerity or lack thereof. Is the *Legend* a melodrama or a travesty? I hope to suggest that contrary conclusions remain largely a question of different readers' predispositions and that these dispositions are themselves responses to critically informed pre-

[9] See, for example, Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), and 'Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the "Chaucer Tradition" ', in Daniel J. Pinti, ed., *Writing after Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (New York, 1998), pp. 101–26; Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, 1993), and 'Textual Criticism and Literary Theory: Chaucer and His Readers', *Exemplaria* 2 (1990), 329–345; and Joseph A. Dane, *Who is Buried in Chaucer's Tomb?* (East Lansing, MI, 1998).

sentations, or textual-performances. In other words, every published version of the *Legend* both presumes and invites some particular type of properly performed reader response.

Reading the Legend *According to the Premises of 'Oral Performance Theory' vs. 'Performance Theory' vs. 'Performativity'*

The most straightforward and familiar use of the term *performance* denotes only, 'The recitation of poetry either by its author, a professional performer, or any other reader either alone or before an audience; the term normally implies the latter.'[10] The premise that 'Chaucer performed the *Legend*' is easy enough to posit; its critical implications are far more problematic. Imagining such a *viva voce* recital is intuitively simple, but the interpretive performance event itself, if – as is normally the case – unrecorded or otherwise undocumented, remains unfixed in any detail. A reading that would reconstruct Chaucer's own recital of the *Legend* must propose a compendium of plausible interpretations of every line filtered (by rehearsal or re-reading) into a comprehensive and consistent enactment of the extant text. The result of this preparatory process of interpretation by the reciter expedites an anticipated audience's collective and concurrent responses to the enhanced semiotics of actual recitation. Much the same process precedes an editor's or a critic's or a teacher's meta-recital of what the *Legend* means. The most basic understanding of *performance* as 'reading aloud' becomes even more complicated when every presentation of any text is defined as a *performance* insofar as some type of interpretive enactment is required to stimulate the reader's comprehension of a text in hand – *a priori*, concurrent, or subsequent reading (by an intermediary or by oneself) that manipulates responses to the *published* (likewise broadly defined) reproduction of the author's composition in a specifically anticipated context of reception. Thus, the term *performance* may be applied literally to assess the putative *pronuntiatio* and kinesics of a historicized reciter – its conventional usage. Or the meaning of *performance* may be transferred to explicate the author's process of composition. Or the term may be applied to the subsequent production of a clean copy that then establishes a standard reading of that text in the author's absence. The resulting 'text itself' forms the evidentiary basis that both generates and tests any critic's particular reading of the *Legend* as a presumed performance. Each such reading/presentation is self-justifying in terms of its own performance protocols.

The protocols for editing a Middle English text are most strict, though not

10 Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, eds, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, s.v. 'Performance', p. 892a.

inflexible. The protocols for staging a modern performance of a medieval play are most inventive, though not unrestricted. The far less established protocols for inducing Chaucer's public reading of the *Legend* as a recital script seem something in between editing and playing. The concurrent, immediate, and communal responses of his familiar audience to such an actual recitation seem obviously distinguishable from the silent, but reflective and so self-discursive, responses of modern Chaucerians. Any one member of a real audience is poised to hear the text more passively and to qualify individual responses in terms of a simultaneously perceived collective reaction. In act, the solitary reader plays a more dynamic and so seemingly hegemonic role as the reciter of the text to self. The solitary reader thus tends to think of critical analysis of the text as individual *invention* ('interpretation' means 'talking about' the text). The members of an audience experience interpretation, however, primarily as a collective *reception* of the performer's intentions ('listening' rather than 'reading'). But the solitary reader of any published rendition of the *Legend* must also engage in a prolonged and ongoing conversation with other professional readers who comprise the text's enduring audience, its critical heritage. Here, the absolute distinction between relativistic 'reader-response' and the historicized reaction of a listening audience collapses. If the implied audience of any text is always a fiction, then too the reader of a text-in-hand is never absolutely alone.[11]

At least three quite distinct branches of critical inquiry currently employ some permutation of this basic term *perform* to describe reading as an interpretive event: 'oral performance theory', 'performance theory', and 'performativity'. It would be both melodramatic and misleading to assert that these three schools of thought are inherently hostile to one another and competing to control all future interpretation of the *Legend* as *performance*. Few practitioners of these differing definitions of *performance* address each other's theoretical premises in general, and fewer still bother to read *The Legend* in particular. Furthermore, it is quite impossible to indicate the full range of possible *performances* of the *Legend* valorized by each of these three largely independent understandings of the seemingly simple word *perform*. 'Oral performance theory', especially when expanded to the study of 'orality', flies off into the history of consciousness. 'Performativity' launches into the philosophy of language. And 'performance theory' crosses the event horizon of Critical Theory. Yet, the interpretive postulates of these quite divergent understandings of the term *perform* do explain several of our often radically contradictory understandings of the *Legend* at present.[12]

[11] Walter J. Ong, S.J., 'The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction', *PMLA* 90 (1975), 9–22. See Betsy Bowden, *Chaucer Aloud: The Varieties of Textual Interpretation* (Philadelphia, 1987), for analysis of the pedagogical heritage of interpretive performances.

[12] Not so strangely, the three main conceptions of reading as *performance* seem to align with Denis Donoghue's categorization of the 'Three Ways of Reading' in *The Practice*

The reading protocols of 'oral performance theory' (most properly defined) originate with Albert Bates Lord and Milman Parry's definition of oral formulaic composition.[13] Understanding the underlying processes of such oral performance as simultaneous composition and transmission informs any reading that appreciates Homer's *poesis* as such. But the paradigm of this 'strong theory' has been repeatedly modified to accommodate first Old English alliterative verse and then the memorial, improvised performances of late medieval verse, both alliterative and rhyming. The postulate of an absolute divide between 'oral' and 'written' presentation, for example, is seldom maintained when discussing the *performance* of medieval chirographic compositions. In theory, a medieval manuscript could actually preserve a specific oral performance recorded by dictation. More probably, any given Middle English manuscript preserves a record of its composition copied prior to performance, but in deliberate anticipation of actual recital. This less rigorous conception of 'oral performance theory' focuses on the putative event of original presentation and its interpretive circumstances.

Alternatively, the term *performance* is used by some contemporary theater/theory troupes to allow a more or less arbitrary rendering of a scripted performance. The precedent text means whatever a modern reader/performer can dramatically enable it to mean. This more recent, more amorphous, and currently more popular sense of 'performance theory' is used in such diverse fields of criticism as drama/film studies, gender studies, and composition theory. Most broadly defined, these post-Derridean applications of 'performance theory' explore the free, self-referential and often subversive strategies of role-playing available to the author or reader of a text as well as to the self-fashioning of characters and actors.

of Reading (New Haven, 1998). The linguistic definition of 'performativity' promises a confident comprehension of 'the' *Legend* analogous to Matthew Arnold's trust in *objective* reading – that is, 'to see the object as in itself it really is'. More libertine interpretations of a *Legend* based on 'performance theory' reflect Oscars Wilde's celebration of *creative* criticism. In between, critical interpretations of the text of the *Legend* as an 'oral performance' analyze the extant record of its recital to achieve a reading analogous to Walter's Pater's *impressionistic* criticism. Donoghue himself reaffirms the integrity of a reader's *impression* of a poet's own voice: 'I construe the voice as a sign of personal presence, hypothetical no doubt, the presence of a textual self, not necessarily ontological, but sufficiently stable to last for the brief spell of the poem' (p. 111). With particular reference to reading 'the' *Legend*, James Simpson voices a still somewhat widespread skepticism among Chaucerians regarding such interpretive anxieties inspired by Fish, Rorty, and Derrida, 'I prefer the faith by which there really are meanings in texts, to the faith that we fabricate such meanings', in 'Ethics and Interpretation: Reading Wills in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *SAC* 20 (1998), 73–100, at p. 100.

13 Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, 1960). See Mark Amodio, *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry* (New York, 1994), and *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, 2004).

Thirdly, the neologism 'performativity' is used by linguists to affirm that a particular type of statement's original utterance is determinant of its meaning in subsequent transcription. This conception of 'performativity' – an 'ugly word' coined by J.L. Austin and complemented by John R. Searle's conception of the 'speech-act' – maintains the extra-referential validity of the act of writing and therefore of reading.[14] Austin distinguished *constatives* (including utterances that are descriptions, factual accounts, or narration) from *performatives* which are 'expressions whose function is not to inform or to describe, but to carry out a "performance", to accomplish an *act* through the very process of enunciation'.[15] In contrast to both structural linguistics and transformational grammar, 'the theory of the performative reintroduces the problem of the referent into linguistics'.[16] Such speech acts anticipate enactment as a true response; 'a command, a promise, or a request, its utterance, if sincere, constitutes a commitment, a desire to have fulfilled what is said'.[17] This definition of a competent reader's response to performative utterances can bridge an entirely relativistic conception of 'performance theory' to a more determinant interpretation of Chaucer's reading of the *Legend*.

There are numerous *performatives* proper quoted within the dialogue of the *Legend of Good Women*. Notably, Alceste orders the dreamer to write legends annually as his perpetual penance (F 479–83; G 469–73). In the F-Prologue, Alceste additionally commands, 'And whan this book ys maad, yive it the quene' (F 496). The omission of this dedicatory performative in the G-version of the Prologue is usually read simply as a key indicator of two extant versions' relative dates. Its inclusion in the F-prologue may have originally posed a substantial performance dilemma for Chaucer the reciter, however: how can he pretend to have completed an unending commission in

14 See John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA, 1962); 2nd edn, J.O. Urmson and Marina Shisà, 1975. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this text as the first usage of the adjective and noun 'performative.' Cf. John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, 1969), 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse', *New Literary History* 6 (1974–5), 319–32, and 'How Performatives Work', *Linguistics and Philosophy* 12 (1989), 535–558. In '*Guslar* and *Aoidos*', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 126 (1996), 11–41 - that is, in 'oral performance theory' proper – John Miles Foley uses the term 'performative' to designate the usually unrecorded use by *guslari* of 'non-lexical and otherwise meaningless consonantal sounds' (p. 22) that bridge formally awkward glottal stops between vowels.

15 Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (*Le Scandale du corps parlant* [Editions du Seuil, 1980]), trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, 1983), p. 15.

16 Felman, p. 74.

17 Eugene Green, 'Speech Acts and the Art of Exemplum in the Poetry of Chaucer and Gower', in Rosanne G. Potter, ed., *Literary Computing and Literary Criticism: Theoretical and Practical Essays on Theme and Rhetoric* (Philadelphia, 1989), pp. 167–87, at p. 167.

order to present its finished text right now? Reading the tone of this inherently absurd imperative as such depends entirely upon the reader's perception of the entire *Legend* as comic. Likewise, most of the performatives that the text reports as spoken by Chaucer *in propria persona* present comparably radical interpretive cruces regarding the general tone of his original utterance; a notable example would be Chaucer's invitation concluding the legend of Phyllis that 'ye wemen . . . trusteth, as in love, no man but me' (F 2559–61).[18]

Eugene Green has extended this basic principle of performativity to analyze the differing rhetorical effects achieved in otherwise similar narratives composed by Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower: 'The women of Chaucer's *exempla*, whether distraught or hopeful of achievement, are much more likely to express themselves in the imperative mood (a significant finding) than Gower's women.'[19] Chaucer seems more a playwright; Gower, more an exegete. Though focusing primarily on the tales proper, Green quotes the F-Prologue of the *Legend* (86–96) in order to clarify his fundamental contrast between Gower and Chaucer: 'Gower invites his readers to contemplate the morality of antiquity as vital to them; Chaucer's art supposes that moral passions expressed by women of the past can find convincing expression in fourteenth-century England.'[20] The same linguistic confidence that underpins Chaucer's re-enactment of the complaints of ancient women encourages the modern reader's performance of his own 'vois, ryght as yow lyst' (F 93).

Translating the implications of *performativity* from linguistics to performance-based criticism allows more than just a quantitative survey of performative utterances cited within a text. The interpretive assurances of such referentiality may be extended by analogy to the speech-act of reciting the entire text.[21] Whereas to date thematic interpretation of the *Legend* as a

18 Comic interpretations of any text – including 'the' *Legend* – prove especially dependent on retrieval of the performer's voice; Walter Nash explains what laughing readers intuitively know, that 'the language of humour is powerless without the *speech* of humour. Jokes are *told*; somewhere beyond the text is a voice, telling, delivering, timing' in *The Language of Humour: Style and Technique in Comic Discourse* (London, 1985), p. 172.

19 Green, p. 183. Green's computational analysis of 'performative verbs, verbs in the imperative mood, and the modal auxiliaries *shal* and *wol* that have first-person pronouns (*I* and *we*) as subjects' (p. 168) explains a common impression that Chaucer's narratives seem more lively than Gower's: 'the effect of these significantly different practices is that Chaucer emphasizes the urgency in the voice of women, whereas Gower responds diversely to the dilemmas and challenges that women in his exempla face' (p. 179).

20 Green, pp. 184–85.

21 In 'Perfomative Utterances' (J.L. Austin, J.O. Urmson, G.J. Warnock, *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edn [Oxford, 1979]), Austin provided a more general theory of speech acts 'in his doctrine of illocution. Encompassing and broadening the concept of the

narration has focused primarily on its constative content, interpretation of the *Legend* as a performative utterance *in toto* would focus rather on Chaucer's intentionality while performing his commissioned act of penance – or, if one assumes a radically contrary context of presentation, his comedy act.

Once upon a time, the notion that Chaucer personally recited all his own works aloud was largely taken for granted by Chaucerians. The first detailed analysis of Chaucer's writings specifically in terms of an 'oral performance theory' – as distinguished from more conventional studies of his narrative art in terms of medieval rhetoric – appeared in 1938.[22] Chaucer's texts do preserve some readable though ambiguous indicators of their proto-recitals, internal evidence which may be supplemented by external information regarding each text's initial context of presentation, including the putative occasion of its composition and/or performance and the ambience of its target audience. The text(s) of the *Legend of Good Women* provide relatively strong indications that Chaucer once read this project in a specific way before a specific audience.[23] Any critical reconstruction of that performance, however – the validity or 'felicity' of which must be assessed in terms of its comprehensiveness and self-consistency – still presents only *a* performance of the surviving text of the *Legend*, not a compelling and exclusive staging of the *Legend*. Chaucer himself or some scribe revised this original *script* of the *Legend* (which I believe is best preserved by the F-Prologue) for subsequent publication as a *text*. This re-conception of the anticipated performance of the *Legend* represents not only a transition in Chaucer's self-consciousness as author but a conscious recognition that his recital voice *per se* would be significantly absented from all future performances of the *Legend*. The G-version of the Prologue may thus be read as an authorial or scribal repackaging of the *Legend*, another kind of performance that initiates a long series of re-definitions of the text's presentation to the public.[24]

performative, the "illocutionary act" is the speech performance examined with reference to the *context* of the interlocution, to the concrete and discursive situation in which speech acquires, above and beyond its meaning, a certain force of utterance . . .' (Felman, p. 18). The 'locutionary act' produces meaning; the 'illocutionary act' has force; the 'perlocutionary act' produces effects on the interlocutor. Austin did not consider the utterances of a written text so 'tethered to their origin' as speech.

22 Ruth Crosby exhaustively cataloged Chaucer's use of direct address in 'Chaucer and the Custom of Oral Delivery', *Speculum* 13 (1938), 413–32; cf. her 'Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 11 (1936), 88–110. At least two qualifications of Crosby's 'proof' of Chaucer's oral performance need to be conceded: the textual signs of his actual recitals may be often either vestigial or metaphoric, and not all of Chaucer's verse needs to be read according to a single definition of 'orality'.

23 'The audience is the least understood component of all performative arts: Western poetics has taken virtually no interest in this subject. It is obvious, however, that audiences often bring with them significant sets of expectations about subject, diction, tone and versification' (Preminger, *New Princeton Encyclopedia*, pp. 892b–893a).

24 In *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge, 2000), Leah Price analogously

Though practitioners of 'oral performance theory' seldom engage in the often paralyzing anxieties of critical theory, advocates of a newer conception of 'performance theory' frequently do. It is essential to disassociate the interpretive premises of 'oral performance theory' – which attempts to retrieve the proto-recital of a text as a real moment that establishes an objective referent for future reading – from 'performance theory' – which valorizes the freer play of reader-response criticism to a self-referential text.[25] Currently, this most amorphous use of the term *performance* stands in direct opposition to the privilege of an original reading. Once re-designated a *play* rather than a *narration*, any reading of the *Legend* may be performed at will. Both performance-based theories invite freer readings of the printed *Legend*. In 'performance theory', however, no reading is given credence as *the* reading; any viable reading is as valid as any other inherently interesting though arbitrary response.[26] Legitimacy is determined only by the approval of its modern audience/readership. In 'oral performance theory', however, the integrity of a reading of the *Legend* is arbitrated in terms of its plausibility as a reconstruction of the historical court's responses to the text's proto-performance. Such a reading attempts to approximate the perceptions of an actual though now only textually implied audience.

Interpretations based on either of these two performance-based theories acknowledge that a critic's response offers a mediating performance of the text. A reading of the *Legend* based on its 'oral performance' must clarify the

affirms that 'The work of professional mediators like editors, condensers, and reviewers figures less often in critical text than in scholarly footnotes . . . Yet competing editorial alternatives . . . add up to more than a series of accidents in the transmission of particular texts. They also shape the larger generic system' (p. 10).

25 Carl Ginet, in 'Performativity', *Linguistics and Philosophy* 3 (1979), 245–65, clarifies the contrasting linguistic conviction that every performance has an interpretive field of external referentiality: 'Every act signified by a meaning verb phrase has as its core an utterance act, an act of producing a certain type of sound or gesture or other perceptible sign: it is by producing a certain type of utterance that an agent means something. The nature of the act signified by any particular meaning verb phrase can be specified by giving the conditions that it imposes on the core act of utterance, the conditions that must be satisfied by that utterance if performing it is also to be performing that act. These conditions will fall into one or more of the following five categories' (pp. 247–8). The five categories are an utterance's stage setting, the form of utterance, the consequences of utterance, the external relations of the utterance other than its consequences, and the intentions regarding the consequences of the utterance; together they read the utterance as both enacted and extra-referential. Both fluent speaker and faithful listener process all of these interpretive filters both instantly and easily. The successful listener or reader achieves, in Austin's lexicon, 'felicity'; misinterpretation (such as mis-perception of tonal intent) exemplifies 'infelicity'.

26 As Denis Donoghue laments in *The Practice of Reading*, 'If it is widely supposed that all such frameworks are in any case merely "constructed" rather than innate, natural, or otherwise privileged, then any one of them is just as employable as another' (p. 34).

historical expectations of both Chaucer himself and his initial audience. The substantial appeal of less historicized readings based on 'performance theory' is that they can liberate interpretation of the *Legend* from institutionally maintained orthodoxies. The primary threat that this 'antidiscipline' poses to traditional reading or staging (and to the underlying premise of authoritative interpretation) is that it promotes an anything-goes attitude in the actual performance of a received script. This oppositional definition of *performance* extends into the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and ethnography; arguably, all human activity is scripted.

In response to recent performances that validate subversive (and arguably fallacious) interpretations of Shakespeare by appealing to such 'performance theory', W.B. Worthen has recently invoked the linguistic principle of 'performativity'.[27] For Worthen, the simplest question is the most significant: 'What are dramatic performances performances *of*?'[28] Worthen argues that a particular theatrical performance is fundamentally like an edition of the play: 'One of the ways both literary studies and performance studies have misconceived dramatic performance is by taking it merely as a reiteration of texts, a citation that imports literary or textual authority into performance.'[29] Both an edited text and a staging are iterations of the play. The printed text is more perdurable than a live performance. But either process of representing the playwright's intent requires a redressing of the script in a given interpretive milieu that echoes (the historically explored if not exactly reconstructed) effects of its original presentation in order to achieve some equivalence of that historicized reception. 'While it is time for the presumed authority of texts over performances to be displaced,'[30] performance theory should not delete the text. Conversely, staging should echo, not erase, the text as a recorded memory of authorial intent.

Attempting to retrieve Chaucer's original performance of the *Legend* may seem merely a retreat to New Criticism. If so, it is not restricted to 'the text

27 W.B. Worthen, 'Drama, Performativity, and Performance', *PMLA* 113 (1998), 1093–1107. Worthen starts his critique with a summary of Elin Diamond's *Performance and Cultural Politics*: 'As a consequence, she argues, of the late-1960s experimental theatre, the effect of theory on writing about performance, and "poststructuralist" theorizing (Barthes on Brecht, Derrida on Artaud), performance came to be defined in opposition to theatre structures and conventions' (p. 1093). Austin himself had little linguistic interest in theatrical utterance which he considered the etiolation of speech: 'Oddly enough, while Austin's cavalier dismissal of the theatrical performatives – hollow to whom? in what sense? – now seems to drive literary studies toward performativity and performance, it does so by asserting the peculiar hollowness of dramatic theatre' (p. 1095).

28 Worthen, p. 1100.

29 Worthen, p. 1098.

30 Worthen, p. 1110.

itself' conventionally imagined.[31] Rather, the most rudimentary and common sense understanding of Chaucer's role as first reader of the *Legend* offers (in praxis) the means to an interpretive compromise. On the one hand, Chaucer's original *rehersynge* remains a potentially readable iteration of the *Legend*. On the other hand, subsequent manuscript copies and print editions of Chaucer's *Legend* are to be read as no more than a series of likewise readable iterations – 'authorities' understood in a more restrictive sense as reader-performances presented within specific fields of critical reference.

Presenting the Legend *in Manuscript*

As critics seek and so reformulate a 'best reading' of the *Legend*, editors seek and so reconstruct an approximation of its *alpha*-text. In the continuing quest to define the *Legend* as a text to be read, Janet Cowen and George Kane have most recently provided expert physical descriptions of all thirteen witnesses to the *Legend of Good Women* as well as an exhaustive analysis of the variants among them.[32] Their singular goal is to determine the reliability of each witness as a record of what Chaucer wrote. The product of this scrutiny defines the *Legend* as its best text, but this text invents as much as it retrieves a best context for reading that edited performance. Julia Boffey has observed, for example, that 'The surviving forms of the *Legend*'s manuscript preservation show a tendency on the part of readers and compilers to set it, whole or in parts, dialogically together with other Chaucerian and post-Chaucerian ventures into the *querelle des femmes*.'[33] A stand-alone *Legend* (divorced as such from Chaucer's other compositions or from thematically related pieces) seems much more monologic (and therefore monotonous) than its more contextualized reading-performances.

The same linguistic and codicological evidence (such as dialect, copy size, watermarks, cropping, gathering, binding, scribal hands, rubrication, illumi-

31 Donoghue suspects controversy regarding the integrity of interpretation may be at a point of fatigue rather than resolution: 'The moral of this story is not: Back to the New Criticism. I wish it were . . . The moral is interrogative: Are we quite sure that we have devised methods of reading responsive to our own needs and to the literature we have still to read? Or that we haven't merely transcended the need and forgotten the incitement?' (p. 19).

32 Janet Cowen and George Kane, eds, *The Legend of Good Women* (East Lansing, MI, 1995/Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 1–111. This analysis of all thirteen witnesses examined *in situ* supersedes both J.B. Bilderbeck's analysis and Ernest F. Amy's 'Description of the Manuscripts', *The Text of Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (New York, 1965), pp. 1–14.

33 Julia Boffey, '"Twenty Thousand More": Some Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Responses to *The Legend of Good Women*' in A.J. Minnis, ed., *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions* (York, 2001), pp. 279–97, at pp. 280–1.

nation, marginalia – in other words, the care, costs, and chronological contexts of the copying process) that has long been used by bibliographers to determine a given manuscript's provenance and textual integrity also often indicates its particular expectations of presentation. The conspicuous design features of each manuscript as a *performance* of a *Legend* – its layout, illustration, order of compilation, and general quality of transcription – anticipate and cue an appropriate reader-response (suggesting, for example, its completeness or incompleteness, its sincerity or irony). There seems to have been a great variety of anticipated readings of the *Legend* among its manuscript presentations. Print increasingly homogenized this early diversity of anticipated responses, eventually imposing upon the *Legend* an *ex post facto* (silent, sincere, isolated, bourgeois, male-dominated) reading that still prevails, rather than what may well have been the fourteenth-century (aloud, ironic, communal, aristocratic, female-targeted) flavor of Chaucer's original presentation.

Nine of the extant authorities for determining the edited *Legend* are now readily available in facsimile.[34] Each anticipates an initial owner of the *Legend*. As a published performance, each presumes to define a proper reading of the *Legend*. MS Bodley 638 (**B**), for example, seems to be a late fifteenth-century workaday transcription of *The Legend* by a scribe called 'Lyty' intended for solitary reading. This manuscript's compilation consists primarily of erotic complaints and dream visions composed by Chaucer himself and by his imitators, a collection that seems 'specifically designed to appeal to a member of the gentry who might wish to participate in the courtly "game of love" '.[35] By the sixteenth century, however, 'the book may have belonged to a school'.[36] Chaucer's works are clustered together but not pack-

[34] The nine available facsimiles are indicated by an '*'.

Alpha Group (8 authorities):

1. *Tr Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 3. 19
   A1 BL Additional MS 9832
2. *S Bodleian MS Arch. Selden B. 24
   A2 BL Additional MS 12524
3. *Ff Cambridge Univ L Ff MS 1.6
   *P Magdalene College, Cambridge MS Pepys 2006
   R Bodleian L MS Rawlinson C86
   A3 BL Additional 28617

Beta Group (3 authorities)

1. *F Bodleian L. Fairfax 16
   *B Bodleian L. MS Bodley 638
2. *T Bodleian L. MS Tanner 346

*Gg Cambridge Univ. Library

*Thynne's 1532 Edition

[35] *Manuscript Bodley 638: A Facsimile*. Introduction by Pamela Robinson (Norman, OK, 1982), p. xvii.

[36] Cowen and Kane, p. 6.

aged as a discrete grouping; nor are Chaucer's pieces made to seem in any way superior to the contributions of Christine de Pisan or John Lydgate. The current ordering of this manuscript positions the *Legend of Good Women* (fols 48r–95v) specifically between the 'Complaint Unto Pity' and the *Parliament of Fowls* followed by the *House of Fame*. This sequence seems insignificant in itself except insofar as it does not invite chronological considerations of the artistic progress of Chaucer's compositions. Nor does this manuscript suggest that the *Legend* need be read as an incomplete work. Its title, 'The Prologue of .ix. good Women', in fact, suggests the contrary. MS Bodley 638 seems to have been produced (and so performed) as a sincere courtesy book and a good cry. Such a reading of the *Legend* (divorced from any consideration of its original function as an ironic palinode to *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example) heralds the prevailing perception of the *Legend* by modern critics.

Like the Bodley manuscript, 'The bulk of poetic material' gathered in the Fairfax manuscript (**F** Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16) 'derives from the world of "courtly experience" and concerns itself with sophisticated morality and the trials and tribulations of *fin amors* – those concepts and imaginative experiences which reflect the social and literary refinements of the "lettered chivalry" of the time.'[37] This manuscript posits an interpretive focus for reading of the *Legend* that, *mutatis mutandis*, still dominates modern gender studies and political discourse. The full-page illustration of Jupiter presiding over Mars and Venus (fol. 14v) fronting the manuscript further suggests that one should read the *Legend* within the context of a 'battle of the sexes' compendium.[38] The text of this *Legend* (fols 83r–119v) follows John Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* (fols 63r–82v) and precedes the *Parliament of Fowls* (fols 120r–129v), then the *Book of the Duchess* (130r–147v). As does MS Bodley 638, the Fairfax manuscript indicates its own completeness by its reference to 'ix' and no more 'goode Wymen'. The Prologue in the Fairfax manuscript and the immediately following legend of Cleopatra are separated by a two-line incipit centered between two blank line-spaces (fol. 90v). But the elaborate pen flourishes of the first legend's initial 'A' ascend in the left margin to embrace the last seven or eight lines of the Prologue and descend beyond the first fifteen lines of the legend to invite a continuous reading of 'The tale' indicated at the top of this transitional page.

The most critically significant feature of the Fairfax manuscript's presen-

37 Facsimile of *Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16*. Introduction by John Norton-Smith (London, 1979), p. vii b.

38 Norton-Smith affirms that John Stanley or his agent 'acquired the services of an important artist, the Abingdon Missal Master (School of William Abell) to execute a full page illustration' (p. xii a) as a prefatory illustration not only to Chaucer's 'Complaint of Mars' and 'Complaint of Venus' which begin booklet 1 but to the entire *compilatio*.

tation of the *Legend of Good Women* is that it ends mid-page without any explicit or colophon or punctuation, and so without any indication of its unfinished state:

> Fairfax 16 is a nearly perfectly preserved example of a manuscript produced to order by a commercial scriptorium or bookseller (in either Oxford or London) for a single owner belonging to the landed gentry. Assembled from 'booklets', it is not quite an *édition de luxe* or a 'commission'. But there is nothing mediocre about the standard of parchment or the quality of ornament. It is a good gentleman's library copy.[39]

As a fair copy, the Fairfax manuscript thus attempted to reproduce with remarkable scrupulosity what modern editors still seek, namely the faithful re-presentation of what Chaucer actually wrote.[40]

The production values of the Findern manuscript (**Ff** The Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.6) are far less impressive. Its *Legend* is written by 'an undistinguished, basically secretary hand of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, skillful, but without any attempt at distinction.'[41] The Findern Manuscript looks much like a rather bargain-basement hodgepodge of sentimental secular verse; the class of its anticipated readership determines the quality of its scribal performance.[42] 'A variety of hypotheses might be brought forward . . . but one thing is clear: the construction of the manuscript was a collaborative effort involving a surprising number of amateur scribes at work in the same place' – a production context that makes it seem a ' "home-made" anthology'.[43] Its copy of the legend of Thisbe (ff. 64r–67v) is

39 Norton-Smith, p. vii a. Rejecting the hypothesis of an 'Oxford archetype', Norton-Smith argues, 'The bookseller who made up Fairfax 16 made it up "to order", according to choices offered John Stanley, Esq.' (ob. c. 1469) of an elder branch of Stanleys 'whose seat was at Hooten' and who had guardianship of William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, in Westminster and thereby probably acquainted with Charles d'Orleans (p. xiii).

40 The scribe 'is meticulously accurate' (Norton-Smith, p. xi b). 'Fairfax 16 (with Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg. 4. 27) is the most beautifully produced and textually responsible example of the fifteenth century's desire to collect Chaucer and his poetic disciples' (Norton-Smith, p. ix b).

41 Cowen and Kane, p. 8.

42 'The signs are that Ff.I.6 was produced by and for the use of the Findern family and their associates at or in the vicinity of their Derbyshire seat. It is a rare survivor of a variety of manuscript doubtless once owned by many groups of people of social background similar to that of the Finderns' (*The Findern Manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS. Ff. I.6.* Introduction by Richard Beadle and A.E.B. Owen [London, 1977], p. xiv). 'Those responsible for compiling the manuscript confined themselves to transmitting their texts in the workaday script of the period, usually uncorrected, and taken together these are often signs that "private" or amateur scribes have been at work' (p. xi) – scribes considered by R.H. Robbins to be either local women or itinerant professionals ('The Findern Anthology', *PMLA* 49 [1954], 610–42).

43 Beadle and Owen, p. xii.

included in an apparently sentimental sequence between Anelida's complaint (ff. 61r–63v) and 'The Complaint of Venus' (ff. 68r–69v). Reproduced for 'those outside the charmed circle',[44] the intended reader-response to this excerpted legend seems to have been sincere compassion. To the purchaser of this repackaging of a single legend, whatever Chaucer himself once intended as the recital tone of the *Legend* as a whole, mattered not at all.

The rather late discovery of one of Chaucer's earliest manuscripts, the Cambridge University Library MS Gg.4.27. (**Gg**), has created the greatest challenge for modern editors and critics of the *Legend*. This manuscript as a whole was apparently not finished. Its transcription of individual texts suffers from many omissions and mutilations; some texts are composites. There is also the vexed question of its East Anglian dialect – not to mention its scribe's foreignness or inattentiveness or incompetence. Nevertheless, this manuscript looks something like the equivalent of Chaucer's 'First Folio'. Probably copied just prior to 1425, 'The manuscript is the only surviving example of a fifteenth-century attempt to collect Chaucer's major poetical works in one volume.'[45] Joseph Holland 'seems to have regarded the collection as analogous to an early printed edition of Chaucer's "Workes" '.[46] And therefore its version of the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* presents a unique editorial problem as an authoritative alternative reading.[47]

Although canonical inclusiveness does seem to have informed the contents of this manuscript's production, chronological order – insofar as it is possible to determine the original order of the manuscript's contents – does not: 'Henry Bradshaw sought to reconstruct the original manuscript . . . Subsequently all the seventeenth-century additions were removed to the end of the volume, and the fourteenth-century quire was bound separately as MS Gg.4.27(2).'[48] The resulting sequence of a subset of items (6 to 11; fols 14–516v) imposes an architectonic significance on the transcriptions; each item begins in the middle of a quire and is then copied consecutively with

[44] J.E. Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London, 1961/ 1979), p. 224.

[45] *The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Facsimile of Cambridge University Library Ms Gg 4.27.* 3 vols. Introduction by M.B. Parkes and Richard Beadle (Cambridge, 1979), vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 1.

[46] Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 1. 'The "finishing" of the manuscript was clearly planned, and presumably executed on a lavish scale, but the surviving leaves, and the traces on the stubs can only give a partial impression of the illustration and decoration of the manuscript, and for this reason we are reluctant to embark on a detailed discussion here' (p. 58).

[47] 'The inclusion of that version of the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* containing the extra references to Chaucer's writings (lines 414–15), and Chaucer's age (lines 261–2, 400–1) confirms the impression of enthusiasm for the poetry of a particular literary personality' (Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 64).

[48] Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 1. 'Items *12–*27 . . . drawing upon the 1598 edition of Chaucer's work by Speght' (p. 4).

potential significance at least in terms of its juxtaposition to adjacent readings. *Troilus and Criseyde* (Item 6) is followed by the *Canterbury Tales* (Item 7), then the *Legend of Good Women* with its unique *Prologue* (Item 8), then the *Parliament of Fowls* (Item 9), then Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* (Item 10), then 'La compleyn' ('Allas for thought . . .', IMEV 147; Item 11). *Troilus and Criseyde* was apparently meant to be formally separated from the *Canterbury Tales* by an illustration and at least a blank leaf (or leaves for other material); likewise, the *Canterbury Tales* is separated from the *Legend of Good Women* by at least a blank verso.[49] Within the collection, each composition seems intended to be read as an autonomous interpretive event, with the exception of 'La Compleyn in the stint of Scribe B' which 'has been treated as though it were merely a division of the *Temple of Glass*.'[50] This positioning of *Troilus and Criseyde* before the *Canterbury Tales* is not reflected in most modern editions. The manuscript's compilation, if intended to be read *seriatim*, disrupts the dramatic (and so thematically significant) sequence of performing *The Legend* as a sequel or palinode to the *Troilus*.[51] Less care seems to have been given to Items 8 through 11 in this manuscript, including the *Legend*, than to Chaucer's preceding (major) works. This degradation may have been merely a matter of production costs, but it disposes readers to perceive the *Legend* as a less successful poem.[52] In such often subliminal ways, each copy of the *Legend* invites its readers to perform/respond to a given presentation of the text with certain preferred if not always predictable dispositions.

The most intriguing aspect of MS Gg as a performance event in itself is its apparent rewriting of *Chaucer* for a specifically anticipated readership. Parkes and Beadle speculate that 'It is not possible to provide detailed evidence of the origin and early history of Gg.4.27, but it is not difficult to offer plausible contexts for its production and use.'[53] MS Gg was apparently intended to be read aloud to an audience who would have found Chaucer's original language odd:

> The most plausible explanation for the 'translation' of the texts in Gg.4.27 is that kind of informal social activity to which Chaucer's poetry appealed, and which the person who commissioned the manuscript had in mind,

49 Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 42.

50 Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 1.

51 Among the seventeenth-century additions to the MS Gg, item 19 (fol. 8r–v) supplies *Troilus and Criseyde* Book I, lines 1–70, followed by item 20 (fol. 9r) Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, lines 582–609.

52 'The presentation of the texts in the last part of the manuscript has not been completed. Illuminated borders accompany the initials at the beginning of the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Parliament of Fowls*, and each individual Legend commences with a flourished pen-work initial' (Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', pp. 43–44).

53 Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 63.

> required the texts to be read aloud . . . although the milieu would not have been that of the court but that of an East Anglian country house.[54]

This anticipated setting for presentation defines 'reading' as prolocution; this definition does not, however, prevent or disqualify subsequent, alternative conceptions of reading the *Legend*. Line markings in the manuscript, for example, indicate that 'some readers used the texts as a quarry for writing verses or for elegant phrases'[55] – such readers (or vandals) are solitary readers defined in the modern conventional sense. Once in John Holland's possession, the manuscript becomes a private antique; once again made public, it serves as a textual witness to be stripped of its peculiar performance features.

The Pepys manuscript (**P** Manuscript Pepys 2006) has been very tentatively dated to the end of the fifteenth century though the 'first part of the manuscript seems rather earlier'.[56] It has been rebound, so its original order of contents is unknown. Scribe B, the hand of most of the *Legend of Good Women* (pp. 53–88), is 'a small, well formed secretary hand'[57] and 'nondescript . . . of the middle grade'[58] – a serviceable and economical copy for the solitary, silent, sincere reading of a merchant.[59] But, by the time this gathering of 'MSS Fragments of Chaucer Some Whereof never printed' comes into the possession of Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), the manuscript *per se* has become an antique prize. Pepys shelved this trophy of the *Legend*, but probably read 'his favorite poet' in print.[60]

The Selden manuscript [**S** Bodleian MS Arch. Selden B.24] is datable to approximately the last decade of the fifteenth century and is extraordinary for a number of reasons, including the fact that its anticipated readership was not the ever increasing market of bourgeois Englishmen. It seems to have been commissioned as the prized possession of an aristocratic Scottish bibliophile. The text of *Troilus and Criseyde* (fols 1–118v) leads this predominantly amorous compilation; it is followed by eleven shorter pieces (including Lydgate's 'Complaint of the Black Knight', Hoccleve's 'Mother of God', Chaucer's 'Complaint of Mars' and 'Venus', Clanvowe's 'Book of Cupid'). Next comes the *Parliament of Fowls* (fols 142–52); after which the *Legend*, or 'Chaucere the legendis of ladyus' (fols 152v–91v) precedes this manuscript's unique copy of *The Kingis Quair* (fols 192–211), followed by Hoccleve's 'Letter of Cupid' and eight more lyrics (ending fol. 231v). The

54 Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', pp. 64–65.
55 Parkes and Beadle, vol. 3, 'Commentary', p. 65.
56 *Manuscript Pepys 2006, A Facsimile*. Introduction by A.S.G. Edwards (Norman, OK, 1985), p. xxiii.
57 Edwards, p. xxv. Edwards assigns pp. 71–2 to Scribe G.
58 Cowen and Kane, p. 11.
59 Edwards, p. xvii.
60 Edwards, p. xxx.

original production of this manuscript is attributable with unusual confidence to a celebratory context. The specific occasion may have been the marriage of Lord Sinclair to Margaret Hepburn in 1489, or King James IV's marriage to Margaret Tudor in 1503, or – 'Perhaps the most attractive hypothesis' – the manuscript was commissioned by Henry Sinclair, perhaps as an act of family piety; his grandmother was sister of King James I.[61]

The Selden manuscript is atypically ornate, though much of the decoration may have been added later. 'The copy of The Legend of Good Women, is similarly unusual in the systematic elaborateness of its decorative programme. No other manuscript of it is comparable.'[62] How Chaucer's works were physically circulated in Scotland 'has yet to be discerned'.[63] But wide margins, elaborate initials and the fact that there was a 'general intention to end individual legends as near to the bottom of the page as possible', all contribute to an elegant reading experience.[64] This manuscript's explicit indicates that its *Legend* is ended 'thus' for a highly finished readership.

The original ownership of MS Tanner 346 (**T**) remains unknown. It 'consists of four booklets written in the mid-fifteenth century by three scribes'.[65] The *Legend* starts this anthology, one of earliest collections of Chaucer's minor poems – but the Tanner manuscript does not itself invite readers to think of Chaucer's *Legend* as 'minor'. This manuscript's rather haphazard compilation suggests that the *Legend* had circulated in pamphlet form as a stand-alone text.[66] The primary goal of the scribes seems to have been the same as that of modern editors – to reproduce a corrected text of the *Legend*.[67] As in a modern critical edition, the Tanner manuscript seems designed to expedite access to *Chaucer*: 'The decoration of the manuscript is intended to help the reader find his way about the volume.'[68]

MS Trinity R.3.19 (**Tr**) is a miscellany of forty-seven 'generally secular' items produced in or near London between 1478 and 1483 representing 'a

61 *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and the Kingis Quair: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Arch. Selden B. 24*. Introduction by Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 1–60, at p. 20.

62 Boffey and Edwards, p. 15.

63 Boffey and Edwards, p. 18.

64 Boffey and Edwards, p. 12.

65 *Manuscript Tanner 346: A Facsimile*. Introduction by Pamela Robinson (Norman, OK, 1980), p. xvii.

66 One of the more curious details of the Tanner MS is the marginalia 'Anne' (fol. 70r) written in the second half of the fifteenth century in the right margin of the third stanza of the 'Complaint of Venus.'

67 Copying of the *Legend of Good Women* was divided between scribes A and B. 'All three scribes were careful copyists and appear to have made very few errors in transcription. Whenever they realised that they had made a mistake, they themselves corrected it' (P. Robinson, *MS Tanner*, p. xxii).

68 P. Robinson, p. xxiii.

taste that may perhaps most safely be called eclectic'.[69] The entire manuscript, written with care and clarity but little or no ornamentation, gives the general impression that this handsome volume was intended for the business of reading at random. The book serves as a topical sampler that its owner, like Jenkyn, might repeatedly cite. This collection, especially the texts copied by Hand A compiled nearest to the *Legend*, focuses on the theme of love. The *Legend*, here titled 'the Boke called the Legend of Ladyes', appears (fols 114r–150v) at the beginning of Booklet 8 in a collection of 13 booklets. It is preceded by the *Assemble of Dames* (fols 55r–65v; 66r–v blank) comprising Booklet 6, and by 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (fols 98r–108v; IMEV 1086), 'The .X. Comaundements of loue' (fols 109r–110r; IMEV 590), and 'The .IX. ladyes Worthy' (fols 110v–111r; IMEV 2767), comprising Booklet 7. Booklet 8 ends with the lyric 'Pyte that I have sought so yore ago' (fols 151r–152v; IMEV 2756) – all attributed in the manuscript to Chaucer, all establishing an interpretive context for performing the *Legend* as a part of a sincere anthology exemplifying the pitfalls of love with tones ranging from misogyny to romantic idealism. But this presentation offers no invitation to an ironic reading.[70] Although Derek Pearsall's jibe that this manuscript represents the taste of bourgeoisie who preferred 'a big book to a good one' may be 'an oversimplification',[71] manuscript *performances* of the *Legend* throughout the reputedly 'drab' fifteenth century do indicate a widening of Chaucer's readership. The poet-reciter's original fourteenth-century audience, Queen Anne and her attendants, were few but choice. Scribal efforts to reproduce a textual record of that *Legend* generated a multitude of contextually different interpretations, each of which patently becomes (for better or worse) a new *Legend*, no one of which would have been immediately subjected to collation by its intended readers and then recognized as something other than the *Legend*. Surveying these manuscripts *en masse* highlights the variety of *Legends* that existed prior to modern editing. Establishing one best text of the *Legend*, however, subpoenas these same manuscript readings as witnesses against themselves. The editorial need to retrieve from a hodgepodge of *Legends* one canonical text for definitive publication advocates a highly restricted presentation of the *Legend* that anticipates silent reading as its only legitimate performance. Whereas the manuscripts often seem

69 *Manuscript Trinity R.3.19, A Facsimile*. Introduction by Bradford Y. Fletcher (Norman, OK, 1987), p. xv.

70 Fletcher explains, 'the manuscript is presently misbound: folios 154–69 belong after folio 8, and folios 67–97 should follow folio 169 and precede folio 9' (p. xx) removing two excerpts from the *Fall of Princes* (fol. 67r; ll. 3522–28, 3795–3801; *IMEV*, 3493) which appear as 'A false start on the second quire of booklet 10, here canceled in red' (p. xvii) and the 'Banquet of the Gods and Goddesses' identified as by Lydgate in the manuscript (fol. 68r) to Booklet 2.

71 Bradford Fletcher does not agree with Derek Pearsall's assessment (p. xv).

customized to the tastes and reading applications of their anticipated patron-readers, printed editions of *Chaucer* increasingly shape each reader's dispositions to conform to a scholarly standard of interpretation. This does not necessarily generate a fallacious reading of the *Legend*, but it does restrict the protocols of 'reading'. Most often, the serious labor of reconstructing a definitive edition is conceived as also establishing *the* interpretive context delimiting the performance tone of all future readings, and so the printed publication of the *Legend* constructs an interpretive prison rather than a stage for further performances.

Presenting the Legend *in Print*

Bluntly, to date the textual effects of the 'oral performance' of medieval chirographic compositions interest modern editors only to the extent that they can subsequently determine and then remove the contaminations of such oral transmission. Yet, printed editions of the *Legend* have never been neutral, objective presentations. As with the manuscripts, certain key design features of printed editions construct a reader's context of interpretation, including each *Legend*'s format, its placement in a collection, commentary, and annotation. To a certain extent such explicit features of editorial interpretation are easier to recognize (and accept or dismiss as such) simply because they are so overt. More minute yet pervasive controls on a reader's response to the *Legend* are achieved by each edition's glosses and punctuation.[72]

[72] See R.K. Root, 'Publication Before Printing' *PMLA* 28 (1913), 417–31, and H.S. Bennett 'The Production and Dissemination of Vernacular Manuscripts in the Fifteenth Century' *The Library* V. 1 (1946–1947), 167–78. All punctuation provides recital prompts (and local interpretations) of 'the' *Legend*. See M.B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot, 1992). Elizabeth Solopova argues for the special status of the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts in determining Chaucer's own punctuation, in 'The Survival of Chaucer's Punctuation in the Early Manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*', in A.J. Minnis, ed., *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Traditions* (York, 2001), pp. 27–40.

Peter J. Lucas in *From Author to Audience: John Capgrave and Medieval Publication* (Dublin, 1997) defines step 8 of the process of medieval manuscript publication this way: 'When the work was received by the *destinataire* or patron it was effectively published' (p. 2). Lucas considers the evidence for Capgrave's practice as author/publisher in pursuit of 'readability' exceptional. In Chapter Seven, 'The Readability of the Text: The Author's Writing Habits and Methods', Lucas details a perhaps unique example of a late medieval English author's own punctuation; the question of whether the punctuation was intended primarily to aid reading aloud or private reading remains difficult to resolve, however, because the punctuation of both methods of reading often coincides. Lucas offers a very qualified conclusion that Capgrave's primary concern was to present a text that served the comprehensibility of a (most often silent) first reading.

A simple but significant example of how glosses both enable and restrict the lexicon

The *Legend of Good Women* was first published in print by William Thynne in 1532. Indeed, the *Legend*'s 'non appearance in print, like that of the *Book of the Duchess*, seems a strange anomaly'.[73] Including the *Legend*, Thynne printed twenty-two works attributed to Chaucer for the first time, only six of which are now considered genuine.[74] Thynne's folio-size black letter edition is now referenced primarily as a textual witness belonging to the ß-group. Editors still consider it a significant authority despite its late date because of Thynne's presumed access to a now lost manuscript authority. But more relevant here is the fact that Thynne's first printed presentation also established several still influential conventions for presenting the *Legend* to modern, silent readers. Skeat judged Thynne's edition of the *Legend* 'of great interest, since no other text was known to readers, or was generally accessible to them, for upwards of three hundred and fifty years.'[75]

After some preliminary material,[76] Thynne's edition presents the *Canterbury Tales* first (pp. 11–272). From a textual editor's perspective, this installment comprises the 'least satisfactory portion of Thynne's edition'.[77] But the habit of fronting the *Canterbury Tales* as Chaucer's best work remains very popular, though Thynne's ordering of the rest now seems rather eccentric. *The Romaunt of the Rose* (pp. 273–356) is printed next, followed by *Troilus and Creseyde* (pp. 357–456), [Henryson's] *Testament of Creseyde* (pp.

of a reader's response to the edited text is offered by differing definitions of 'legend' itself. In both the 1st and 2nd Cambridge Editions, F.N. Robinson defines the term as 'a life of a saint or martyr; sad tale; story' (Glossary s.v. 'Legende'). The Glossary of the Riverside Edition, however, provides the term with an exclusively hagiographic gloss: 'saint's life . . . tale of martyrdom . . . collection of saints' lives.' A title that can be translated as 'The Sad Tale of Cleopatra' seems less inclined to invite irony than one that reads 'The *Vita* of St Cleopatra'.

73 Boffey, p. 295.

74 The other five works are the *Romaunt*, *Book of the Duchess*, 'Complaint to Pity', 'Lack of Steadfastness', and the 'Treatise on the Astrolabe'. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and Others Being a Reproduction in Facsimile of the First Collected Edition 1532 From the Copy in the British Museum*. Introduction by Walter W. Skeat (London, n.d), p. xvii.

75 Skeat, *Facsimile*, p. xxxii. William Caxton, Richard Pynson, Wynkyn de Worde and Julian Notary all neglected to publish a *Legend*. Thynne's edition effectively remained the reigning authority of 'the' *Legend* until surpassed by Skeat's revised edition (1889).

76 The spurious 'Eight goodly questyons, &c.', Hoccleve's 'To the kynges most noble grace, &c.', 'Sayings' and a Preface by Sir Brian Tuke in Thynne's name, celebrating the surprising eloquence of Chaucer 'in his tyme/ whan doutlesse all good letters were layde a slepe throughout ye worlde' (Skeat, *Facsimile* p. xxiii).

77 Skeat, *Facsimile* p. xxv. Thynne's 1532 edition does not include the 'Plowman's Tale' which is inserted at the end of the Second Folio (1542). Skeat discusses Thynne's decision to present such a piece as canonical. Its inclusion is surprising not because it is so anti-papist, but because it is so patently spurious. Skeat explains the editorial decision specifically in terms of Thynne's deliberately provocative anticipation of a part of his readership's hostility – that of the bishops.

457–464),[78] and then *The Legend of Good Women* with 'Mother of norture, &c.' (pp. 465–94) 'a spurious and wholly unconnected'[79] ballade, followed by Boethius, the *Book of the Duchess* and ending with Chaucer's 'Epitaph' (p. 793). Thynne's edition of the *Legend* includes all nine extant legends in their still accepted order.

Irrespective of being composed in couplets, rhyme royal or prose, all materials in Thynne's *Chaucer* are presented in double columns. This format invites a uniformity of critical response to England's Virgil. Since every text looks the same, every reading sounds the same. How each text was originally intended to be performed is no longer an operative concern. On the other hand, a very provocative (though tacit) suggestion of Thynne's format is that *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *Testament of Cresseid*, *and the Legend of Good Women* should all be read as a cohesive sequence. The preceding *Canterbury Tales* and the *Romaunt* have their own full title pages (pp. 9, 273), as does *Troilus and Crisyede* (p. 357),[80] but the *Testament of Criseyde* begins with merely an enlarged title in the middle of the a-column (fol. ccxix r., p. 457). The title for the *Legend of Good Women* itself is used to fill out the bottom two-thirds of the b-column at the end of the *Testament* (p. 464) though 'The Prologue' begins on a new recto, fol. cc xx (p. 465). Thynne's edition thus seems to preserve some indication that the *Legend* should be read as part of a *querelle*.

At *The Legend*'s conclusion, an end-note fills out the bottom space of the b-column and suggests that the text as a whole is finished:

> ¶Thus endeth the legendes of
> good women/and here
> foloweth a balade
> of Chaucer'. (fol. ccxxxiiii r; p. 493)

The verso of this folio presents a much maligned and spurious Marian poem, the primary function of which seems to be to fill the leaf's verso so that a new book can begin with an ornate title page on the recto. The preceding editorial sequence itself invites a sincere reading of Thynne's *Legend*. The conspicuous piety of this closing ballade confirms a sentimental response to all the preceding texts. Despite the spuriousness of the Marian lyric itself, Thynne's presentation of the *Legend of Good Women* with such a sincerely pious endnote has affected reader-responses to its presumed tone ever since.

The subsequent print history of the *Legend* up to the twentieth century has

[78] Of which Skeat offers this opinion: 'It is almost certain that Thynne intentionally included it as illustrating Chaucer's *Troilus*, well knowing that it was not Chaucer's' (Skeat, *Facsimile*, p. xxxi).

[79] Skeat, *Facsimile*, p. xvi.

[80] The versos of these title pages are left blank so the *incipits* of the subsequent texts are presented as headings to a-columns of the following folios' rectos.

been thoroughly surveyed by Constance S. Wright.[81] Wright does much to exonerate one of the more maligned presentations of *Chaucer* in print, the 1721 edition of John Urry who attempted to 'mend the meter' and revised Middle English spellings to aid pronunciation. Urry's presentation anticipates Michael Murphy's (no less controversial) 'mod-spell' or 'reader-friendly' editions.[82] Yet, Urry's decision to standardize or modernize the *Legend* for easier reading also echoes the apparent policy of MS Gg. Rightly or wrongly from a textual editor's point of view, the critical intuition of such texts is to let the reader more freely perform a written record of Chaucer's intent. All in all, however, substantial variations of the *Legend* among print editions appear far less dramatic than those presented by its manuscripts. Despite lip service to the notion that Chaucer's verse must be read aloud for aesthetic pleasure, print editions generally assume that the real business of interpretation remains the domain of the solitary, silent reader. Eventually, 'reading *Chaucer*' comes to mean the homework of students and the scrutiny of professional critics.

For example, Hiram Corson's *Legende of Good Women* (1864)[83] presents 'the first American and first separate edition of the *Legend*'.[84] Corson's school text stoops to no philological compromising of Chaucer's original readings. Rather, his introduction offers a wonderful apologia for learning to read Chaucer's poetry in Middle English: 'Divorced from this, its essence evaporates, and but little more remains than the mere *thought* which is secreted in it, and which by itself is not poetry at all.'[85] Corson also offers an extensive rebuttal of the criticism that Chaucer's verse now seems crude.[86]

[81] Constance S. Wright, 'The Printed Editions of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*: 1532–1889', *The Chaucer Review* 24 (1990), 312–19. In *A History of English Prosody*, vol. I (London, 1923), George Saintsbury challenged both the desire and the methods of modern editors who would present Chaucer's poetry as more metrically regular than is actually evidenced by any single manuscript; he categorically dismissed the 'piecing together' in critical editions 'things that shall comply with notions . . . which have been excogitated by guesswork' (p. 166). More recently, Tim William Machan ponders the paradox of reconstructing 'the "correct" text of a medieval work . . . it is certain there was no correct Middle English, and it is questionable whether there ever were correct texts of vernacular compositions' (p. 244), in 'Editing, Orality, and Late Middle English Texts' in A.N. Doane and Carol Braun Pasternack, eds, *Vox intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages* (Madison, 1991), pp. 229–45.

[82] Wright, p. 314. Michael Murphy, ed., *The Canterbury Tales: The General Prologue and Twelve Major Tales in Modern Spelling* (Lanham, 1991).

[83] Hiram Corson, ed., *Chaucer's Legende of Goode Women* (London, 1864).

[84] Wright, p. 314. Corson's text is a reprint of Robert Bell's *Works* of 1856.

[85] Corson, pp. [vii]–viii.

[86] Corson voices a highly romanticized response to the inherent orality of Chaucer's verse that is easy for modern bookworms to ridicule: '. . . in Chaucer's day, language was not so entirely divorced from music as it now is. Poetry continued to be recited by minstrels, with a musical accompaniment, and they, no doubt, gave the character to the general enunciation of metrical compositions' (p. xxviii). Rejecting outright Warton's

He (familiar only with the Fairfax 16 and Arch. Seld. B 24 manuscripts) assumed the *Legend* 'was never much multiplied in MS'[87] and that much of Chaucer's composition has been lost. But Corson apparently felt no need to justify his publication of a relatively *minor* poem by Chaucer. His pedagogical purpose was 'to furnish an easy text book for beginners in the study of early English literature';[88] his nice portable book provides copious glosses and annotations but no other interpretive commentary. However, Corson does quote two full quatrains of Tennyson's 'Dream of Fair Women' as an epigraph to his edition, echoing and so inviting the continuation of a highly sentimentalized reader-response to Chaucer's *Legend*.

Although Henry Bradshaw discovered the Gg manuscript in 1864, its alternative version of a Prologue to the *Legend* was not 'brought out' for seven years.[89] When Frederick J. Furnivall did publish the two Prologues side by side, he introduced what would remain the first high hurdle of interpretation confronted by readers of the *Legend of Good Women* for more than a century.[90] Furnivall's intent was to present an opportunity to balance both extant versions of a Prologue to the *Legend*. His transcription of the unique copy of what he considered a 'first cast' (Camb. U. Lib. MS Gg.4.27) of the Prologue begins on page 192 (the equivalent of a verso), and the corresponding lines of the exemplar of its '2nd cast' (Fairfax MS 16) are printed on the facing page 193 (a recto). Though intended to permit concurrent perusal of both versions, this layout actually reinforces the priority explicitly given to the Gg text on the basis of its presumed chronological precedence. The Prologues are formatted to end together in the middle of their respective pages (pp. 230, 231). At the conclusion of the F-Prologue, the rest of page 231 is left blank. Only the Gg version of the nine known legends is then transcribed, continuing immediately on page 230 (as there are no gaps in the

praise of Dryden's superior version of 'The Knight's Tale', Corson counters, 'There is scarcely a passage in the whole poem within the compass of ten verses that Dryden has not emasculated and vulgarized. Pope, in his versions, falls still further below the original' (p. xxxiii).

87 Corson, p. xxxvii.

88 Corson, p. [vii].

89 Wright suggests 'As far as I am able to determine, Bradshaw made his discovery of the unique nature of the Gg. "Prologue" known only to a few fellow scholars, and it was not made public knowledge until F.J. Furnivall's publications in *The Athenaeum* in 1871. I suspect that Bradshaw did not make the unique nature of the "Prologue" public because he intensely disliked any revelation about the nature of a manuscript being made public knowledge until he had thoroughly settled the matter of its significance' (pp. 314–15).

90 Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *A One-Text Print of Chaucer's Minor Poems, Being the Best Text of Each Poem in The Parallel-Text Edition, Etc., Part II*, Chaucer Society Publications, Ser. 1 No. 61 (London, 1880; rpt, 1967).

MS) with the legend of Cleopatra and stopping (p. 292) with the editorial prompt '[Unfinisht]' inserted at the end of the legend of Hypermnestra.

Though published as a purely objective transcription, Furnivall's editorial performance presents not just an authoritative (though now widely rejected) preference for the Gg Prologue as Chaucer's intent but a critical imperative to focus the reader's attention on the *Legend* as a stand-alone text rather than as a palinode or a debate piece in some thematic sequence. Readings of the henceforth twin Prologues usually close interpretation of the *Legend* in upon itself. The miscellany in which Furnivall included this substantial re-reading of the *Legend* also disposed future Chaucerians to accept its minor and incomplete status prior to their own readings.

W.W. Skeat presented the *Legend* in Volume III of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, bound rather randomly together with the *House of Fame*, 'A Treatise on the Astrolabe', and 'An Account of the Sources of the Canterbury Tales.' On each page of the Prologue, Skeat presents the unique 'earlier Version' A [Gg] above the multi-witnessed B [F] version, and 'In many places, the inferior spellings of this MS. are relegated to the footnotes.'[91] He provides asterisks and daggers and gaps to indicate (and so focus the reader's attention upon) the correspondences and discrepancies between the two presumably irreconcilable versions. Skeat indicates the explicit of Prologue 'A' but not 'B'.[92] The title for the legend of Cleopatra (after a nine-line blank space) is presented in capitals (half the size of the *Legend*'s title) and headed with a Roman numeral 'I.' The following legends are similarly formatted, and each ends with an explicit except the ninth. The design suggests a substantial discontinuity between one's reading of the Prologue(s) and then one's reading of each of the discrete legends, even though the reading breaks suggested between following legends may not seem so pronounced because the texts continue mid-page.[93] Much like Furnivall, Skeat concludes his edition of the ninth legend:

> Til she was caught and fetered in prisoun.
> The tales is seid for this conclusioun. . . .
> [Unfinished][94]

The legends should thus be read as an incomplete sequence of discrete *exempla*, not necessarily as a sequence of *legenda* that collectively comprise a single, cohesive, and complete performance.

91 W.W. Skeat, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford, 1894; 2nd edn 1900), p. 65.
92 Skeat, *Works*, p. 105.
93 Skeat, *Works*, pp. 110, 117, 131 ['Part I. The Legend of Hypsipyle'], 137 ['Part II. The Legend of Medea'], 140, 147, 158, 164, 169.
94 Skeat, *Works*, p. 174.

As has now become normative, the single volume 'Globe Edition' (1923)[95] presents the *Canterbury Tales* first. Its *Legend of Good Women* follows the *House of Fame* and 'Adam Scriveyn' in a somewhat arbitrary if not dismissive sequence that separates the text of the *Legend* from *Troilus and Criseyde* by twenty-six pages. The 'two different versions' of the *Legend*'s Prologue are presented side-by-side in double columns with the 'First Version' on the left and the 'Second Version, B', on the right. The legend of Cleopatra and the rest follow immediately after the conclusion of the B-version with incipits/explicits but with no other indications of a significant break in reading mandated by the format. The ninth legend ends with a period and then a sort of ellipsis but no statement regarding its unfinished state. The *Legend* is not explicitly designated a 'minor' work of Chaucer. In his introductory comments, however, A.W. Pollard indicates that he considers the extant text to represent only about half of Chaucer's intended project.[96] Pollard accepts that MS Gg preserves 'the first draft of the Prologue',[97] but his diplomatic text follows the Fairfax manuscript as a (somewhat regretted) base text with better readings taken from Trinity and Gg. Expert editing thus feels enfranchised to correct the texts' surface readings in order to reconstruct a better performance of the *Legend*.

It has been primarily the expert editorial performance by F.N. Robinson that has defined readings of the *Legend* for the last seventy years. There is a not-at-all-surprising consistency from his first Cambridge Edition (1933) through his second edition (1957) to the *Riverside Edition* (1987) edited by Larry Benson *et al.* All three 'Cambridge Editions' present both versions of the Prologue side by side, giving the F-version the slight reading priority of being printed in the left column. All three conclude 'This tale is seyd for this conclusion – [Unfinished.]' Edwards and Shaner maintain many of Robinson's notes as well as his criteria for sorting eleven witnesses into the alpha and beta groups, considering MS Gg a 'special case'. This editorial definition of the *Legend* has served as the touchstone performance for most recent criticism of Chaucer's text.[98]

95 Alfred W. Pollard *et al.* eds., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1923), pp. 585–626.

96 Pollard, pp. xlv–xlvi.

97 Pollard, p. xlvi.

98 F.N. Robinson, ed., *The Poetical Works of Chaucer* (Boston, 1933; 2nd edn 1957). Besides the 'Cambridge Editions', three other modern *performances* of 'the' *Legend* have significantly influenced recent criticism: the editions of E. Talbot Donaldson, Albert C. Baugh, and John H. Fisher. In *Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader* (New York, 1958; 2nd edn 1975), E. Talbot Donaldson presents the *Legend* as one of Chaucer's 'Minor Poems'. Donaldson places his own commentaries at the back of the book in the hope that 'the reader read the poem first' (p. vii). Donaldson presents only the presumably revised G-version of the Prologue and subsequently sanctions a dramatically ironic reading of its narrator's persona. Indeed,

Robinson returns the *Legend* to what seems to have been its original performance position following *Troilus*, but this formatting decision is based on their presumed order of composition; it does not represent an invitation to enact an interpretive recital of the palinode.[99] Robinson suggests that the *Legend* should be read as reflective of the courtly contest of the Flower and the Leaf. He designates the G-version of the Prologue 'a careful revision' that removed inconsistencies and improved its structure though 'Some of the most delightful poetry is sacrificed in the revision.' The legends themselves are 'much inferior' though they represent an 'important stage in Chaucer's literary development'[100] as well as 'an important landmark in versification'.[101] The *Legend* as a whole, of course, fails to achieve the artistry of either *Troilus and Criseyde* before it or the *Canterbury Tales* after. The

Donaldson favors the G-version because it 'has the tighter structure, although it lacks some of the charm of the other; it has been preferred largely because it gives a longer and more comic account of Chaucer's career' (p. 1122). Donaldson does not heartily recommend subsequent reading of Chaucer's nine uneven legends themselves because the poet 'in general . . . gives the impression that he is writing with his left hand'; moments when the author's reluctance is voiced as a 'delightful flippancy' (p. 1123), however, lend these melodramas some dramatic interest.

In *Chaucer's Major Poetry* (New York, 1963), Albert C. Baugh presents his appraised selection of texts in putative chronological order. *The Canterbury Tales*, his 'incomparably greater project', is not given precedence of place, on the one hand. On the other, Baugh includes only one version of the Prologue 'basically that of the Fairfax MS' (p. 215) and only 'The Legend of Cleopatra' – reducing all the rest to minor status. In the first sentence of his introduction to 'the' *Legend*, Baugh also hints that readers should consider its title a 'playful . . . comparison to Christian legendaries'. Baugh warns readers that the *Legend* may be Chaucer's most controversial text and then describes the debates orbiting the text itself. That the *Legend* is incomplete seems a 'probability . . . That Chaucer tired of his task is not impossible' (p. 212).

In *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Fort Worth, 1977; 2nd edn, 1989), John H. Fisher acknowledges that the *Legend* itself signals its composition as a royal commission following *Troilus and Criseyde* and 'Palamon and Arcite', Fisher presents the *Legend*, however, as Chaucer's last dream vision, after the *House of Fame* and before the 'Short Poems'. Fisher prints in full only the F-Prologue, relegating the G-version to notes. He concludes the *Legend* with a period and no editorial indication of its incompleteness other than the absence of an explicit. Fisher's introduction also emphasizes the significance of reading 'the' *Legend* in terms of Chaucer's friendly rivalry with contemporary French poets and with John Gower; see too Fisher's *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York, 1964) and 'The Legend of Good Women' for Beryl Rowland, ed., *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, rev. edn (New York, 1979), pp. 464–76. Fisher, too, assumes 'Chaucer's difficulty in taking his material seriously and his boredom with the subject seems apparent' (Fisher, *Complete*, p. 620b).

99 Robinson identifies the *Legend* with the 'ancient category of palinodes' (1st edn, p. 565; 2nd ed., p. 481a).

100 F.N. Robinson, 1st edn, p. 566; 2nd edn, p. 481b.

101 F.N. Robinson, 1st edn, p. 567; 2nd edn, p. 482b.

Legend's unifying theme (presumably its sincere praise of women) becomes 'monotonous', and the commissioned project was apparently abandoned. Robinson resists outright any attempt to interpret the *Legend* as a burlesque.[102] The introductions to his first and second Cambridge editions are identical except for the addition of a penultimate paragraph that expresses comparable skepticism regarding attempts to date the two versions 'on the basis of historical allegory'.[103]

The apparatus of Robinson's edition establishes a preliminary disposition that defines and maintains the consensus response of modern readers to any performance of the *Legend*. Every attempt to read the *Legend* otherwise must first overcome the enormous prestige of Robinson's judgments. Only recently has his statement of the consensus started to unravel. In the Benson *Riverside Edition*, M.C.E. Shaner introduces the *Legend* as 'a product of Chaucer's maturity' though 'a critical paradox'.[104] The reader of this *Legend* approaches *en garde* because it presents 'one of Chaucer's most problematical works but not one of his least fascinating'.[105] In their Explanatory Notes, M.C.E. Shaner and A.S.G. Edwards reconsider and so renew the 'Two questions'[106] that have dominated modern criticism of the *Legend*: the contrary assessments of its sincerity and of its quality, which also entails the issue of its completeness. Both questions are previewed for the reader as unresolved and perhaps irresolvable. The *Riverside Edition*'s open-mindedness *cum* anxiety about the *Legend* has both challenged and provoked several radically new performances.

The most recent and now definitive performance of a text of the *Legend* is the edition of Janet Cowen and George Kane. Their editorial 'experiment'[107] is to test the validity of reconstructing a copy text of what Chaucer once wrote by using the processes of textual criticism established by Kane himself and E. Talbot Donaldson for their editions of *Piers Plowman* (1960, 1975). Tanner MS 346 serves as a base text with better readings substituted on the basis of a qualitative assessment of authorial originality.[108] Other than punc-

102 'This attempt to find unrecognized humor in the *Legend*, and so to rescue it from the charge of dullness, even if it seemed needful, is ill-advised' (F.N. Robinson, 1st edn, p. 566; 2nd edn, p. 482 a–b).

103 F.N. Robinson, 2nd edn, p. 482.

104 Benson, p. 587a.

105 Benson, p. 588b.

106 Benson, p. 1059b.

107 Janet Cowen and George Kane, eds., *The Legend of Good Women*, Medieval Texts and Studies No. 16 (East Lansing, MI, 1995), p. vii.

108 'The demonstrated character of G's scribal variation has an immediate bearing on the question of revision of the *Legend*. The whole pattern of that variation is such as to establish a primary unlikelihood that any differences between the *Legend* text of G and that of the large family are authorial. Those differences which have been discussed are the results of scribal variation in G or its immediate tradition. Where the

tuation, Cowen and Kane provide no interpretive glosses or commentary that explicitly manipulate the reader's subsequent responses to this *Legend* itself. The most remarkable single feature of this *Legend* is its denial of the G-Prologue's special status as a possible authorial revision. Cowen and Kane present a single, corrected Prologue 'I' (with noted variants) at the head of the sequence of legends formatted to be read as a running sequence rather than as discrete units. Prologue II (G) is printed at the conclusion of the text of the *Legend*.[109] The legend of Hypsipyle and Medea is not subdivided. The legend of Hypermnestra ends with a full colon, but there is no further indication that the text is unfinished. Without attributing any interpretive biases to the editors themselves, I find the most remarkable feature of the Cowen-Kane edition (besides its textual authority) is that it seems so essentially recital friendly. The F-version (which has long seemed closer to Chaucer's original performance script) is again given singular interpretive value as a reading of the Prologue. The very complexity of such a retrieval of Chaucer's authorial intent demonstrates not so much the fragility of the text-in-hand as its flexibility.

Any publication of 'the' *Legend* remains, as it always has been, a performed presentation that guides an anticipated reading. Every edition of *The Legend of Good Women* entails, in other words, a performed articulation of Chaucer's authorial intent, as do every recitation, every reading, and every commentary. Each performance advocates the reciter's or scribe's or editor's or critic's imperative to read the *Legend* in one informed way. This is not news, but familiarity with the definitive text too often hypnotizes even pro-

text of G is superior the explanation is scribal variation is in the tradition of the large family. We have found no evidence of revision of the *Legend*' (Cowen and Kane, p. 132).

109 'The consideration arising naturally is whether the manuscripts of *The Legend of Good Women* represent one or several manuscript traditions. In one sense they represent two. For by the fact of revision the text in G viewed as a whole is essentially that of a different, a new poem. But if before the revision there was a single tradition, now, allowing for scribal error, consistently represented by the manuscripts other than G, then by strict definition G represents a second manuscript tradition only where it reproduces authorial revision or embodies authorial correction of the *Legend* accompanying revision in the *Prologue*. Since we cannot identify such correction, and because where it occurred there is no difference between the original text of the first tradition and that created by the correction, for practical purposes G belongs to the main tradition and is to be used accordingly in editing the poem except where authorial revision can be confidently presumed' (Cowen and Kane, pp. 39–40). George Kane maintained the textual superiority of the F-Prologue in 'The Text of *The Legend of Good Women* in CUL MS Gg. 4. 27' in Douglas Gray and E. G. Stanley, eds., *Middle English Studies Presented to Norman Davis* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 39–58. Joseph A. Dane denies the authority of the G-Prologue in 'The Notions of Text and Variant in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*: MS Gg, Lines 127–38', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 87 (1993), 65–80.

fessional readers into perceiving one processed performance as the perfected product. Every future reader of the *Legend of Good Women* remains able to choose among three distinct conceptions of *performance* as an interpretive premise and thereby to defend an informed reading insofar as it presents both what and how 'the' *Legend* is to supposed to be read.

[Unfinisht]

2

The Flower, the Leaf, and Philippa of Lancaster

JOYCE COLEMAN

Philippa of Lancaster (1360–1415) gets a sentence or two in most accounts of the prologue(s) to the *Legend of Good Women* and in most discussions of Chaucer's female audience.[1] Because Eustache Deschamps named her as the 'fleur de valour' (l. 48) in his ballade 765,[2] she merits some attention in speculations about the Flower and Leaf 'cult' in Chaucer.[3] (Deschamps' poem is reprinted and translated in the appendix to this article.) Earlier, at line 15, Deschamps had praised this lady as a flower fit for a king ('c'est la flour pour un roy'), and a quick dive into Froissart's *Chroniques* confirms that Philippa was at one time under consideration as bride to Charles VI of France (see below). Presumably, during the short period that she was a prospective queen, Deschamps, the royal *huissier d'armes* and court poet, was commissioned or undertook on his own behalf to write her a flattering poem – one of the many occasional praise-poems still surviving among his collected works, and one of the four poems he wrote employing the Flower and Leaf motif.[4] Philippa naturally figures as well in discussions of female audiences for the *Legend*, given that she was John of Gaunt's oldest legitimate daughter and a member of the 'Garter sorority'. Students of John Gower notice her in her

1 E.g., Florence Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 314; Nicola F. McDonald, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Ladies at Court, and the Female Reader', *Chaucer Review* 35 (2000), 22–42, at p. 29. I am very grateful to several generous scholars for their help in preparing this article: to Mark Chinca and Ad Putter for translating a few crucial paragraphs of Dutch; to Sylvia Huot, Kathy Krause, and Lynn Ramey for advice on some difficult passages of Old French; and to Mark Cruse for help in translating ballade 765. Any errors, of course, remain my own.

2 Eustache Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 11 vols, ed. le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire (SATF: Paris, 1878–1903), 4.259–60.

3 For a discussion of the cult, see Derek Pearsall, 'Introduction', in *'The Floure and the Leafe' and 'The Assembly of Ladies'*, ed. Pearsall (London, 1962), pp. 1–77, at pp. 22–29. Some scholars use the title 'Des deux ordres de la Feuille et de la Fleur' or 'Eloge de la Fleur' when designating ballade 765. I will stick to the numerical designation, since both titles seem to have been invented by the editor, the Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire, rather than by Deschamps.

later career as queen of Portugal, when she may have been responsible for the translations of the *Confessio Amantis* into both Portuguese and Castilian.

The present article has two goals. One is to pull together more information on Philippa of Lancaster than has hitherto been available in one place or, it seems, known to any one scholar. Before marrying João of Portugal in 1387, Philippa spent over ten years being betrothed to one or another European noble, a career that ended up distributing her life-story over a range of countries, languages, and histories. Scholars well informed in one area seem to be ignorant of others. It is hoped the biographical research presented here will be useful in offering a more complete view of Philippa's life. It should also support the second goal of this article, which is to argue for an expanded sense of Philippa's literary agency. Her involvement with literature, especially once she had her own establishment as queen, supports the suggestion that she was not merely the passive recipient of a dedication, in the case of ballade 765, or the obedient implementer of her father's or brother's wishes, in the case of the Gower translations. Deschamps' ballade is only the first of many texts that Philippa helped transport across political and linguistic boundaries, exemplifying the role of noblewomen as 'ambassadors of culture' outlined for them by Susan Groag Bell.[5] In particular, I will argue that Philippa had a more active role in the circulation of the Flower and Leaf motif than is often credited, and that she may even have helped precipitate the composition of Chaucer's *Legend*.

The Duke of Lancaster's Daughter

Philippa was born on March 31, 1360, in Leicester Castle and named, presumably, after her grandmother and possible godmother Philippa of Hainaut, wife of Edward III.[6] Her mother, Blanche of Lancaster, had married Edward's son John of Gaunt on May 19, 1359; it was as Blanche's husband that John gained the title – duke of Lancaster – with which he is most often associated. The household in which Philippa grew up was an unusual and

4 Besides ballade 765, ballades 764 and 767, and rondeau 766, also concern the Flower and Leaf cult (Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 4.258, 261–64) (see n. 51 below for a brief summary of their contents). We have no way to tell if Philippa received only the one poem naming her, or if she also received copies of the other three Flower and Leaf poems. Ballade 765 is enough in itself, however, to suggest the outlines of the Flower and Leaf competition.

5 Susan Groag Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, 1988), pp. 149–87.

6 Anthony Goodman, *John of Gaunt: The Exercise of Princely Power in Fourteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 1992), p. 36.

hectic one.[7] Over the course of her childhood her mother gave birth to two more children, Elizabeth (born c. 1364) and Henry (born 1367), then died, on September 12, 1368, when Philippa was eight.[8] Her father remarried out of ambition, to Constanza of Castile (September 1371), and shortly after began his affair with his daughters' governess, Katherine Swynford (c. 1371–72). In 1374 Philippa acquired a half-sister, Catalina or Catherine, daughter of Constanza, while a half-brother died in infancy. Meanwhile, Swynford was producing a series of bastard children (four in all, beginning in 1372), whose father willingly acknowledged them. Counting the daughter of Marie Saint-Hilaire, an earlier mistress, the household might contain up to four different sets of Gaunt's offspring, along with Swynford's two children by her husband (d. 1372) and the duke's wife and current mistress.[9] A family outing in 1381, for example, consisted of Philippa, her step-mother Constanza, her half-sister Blanche (Gaunt's bastard daughter by Saint-Hilaire), and her father's mistress, Swynford.[10] If nothing else, such occasions must have fostered diplomatic skills useful for a future queen! The roll-call of the Gaunt household was further swelled by various notables in residence or passing through, such as John Wycliffe, Walter of Peterborough, John Clanvowe, Oton de Granson, Chandos Herald, John Gower (probably), Geoffrey Chaucer, and Chaucer's wife Philippa, sister of Katherine Swynford and chamber-lady to Duchess Constanza.[11]

7 I use the term 'household' here generally, meaning the immediate family (i.e., the duke's wives, mistresses, and children), plus other individuals closely associated with them or with the duke, whether resident at the Savoy or elsewhere. Of course, this 'household' was rarely if ever all in the same place at the same time; but groups resided together at various locations at various times, and all shared an identity as Lancastrians and a loyalty to Gaunt. For the establishments of Gaunt's first two duchesses and their children, see Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, p. 321.

8 Blanche's death has traditionally been dated to 1369, but J.J.N. Palmer's argument that it occurred on September 12, 1368, has been accepted by historians ('The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A Revision', *Chaucer Review* 8 [1974], 253–61; Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, p. 46).

9 For Marie de Saint-Hilaire and her daughter, see Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt: King of Castile and Leon, Duke of Aquitaine and Lancaster, Earl of Derby, Lincoln, and Leicester, Seneschal of England* (1904; rpt New York, 1964), pp. 460–62. Information on Swynford and the Beauforts is from *ibid.*, pp. 462–63, and G.L. Harriss, *Cardinal Beaufort: A Study of Lancastrian Ascendancy and Decline* (Oxford, 1988), p. 1. Other genealogical information is derived from Brian Tompsett's 'Directory of Royal Genealogical Data', <www.dcs.hull.ac.uk/public/genealogy/royal>.

10 Simon Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity, 1361–1399* (Oxford, 1990), p. 13.

11 For Wycliffe, see Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 37–38; for Walter of Peterborough, see Joyce Coleman, 'Lay Readers and Hard Latin: How Gower May Have Intended the *Confessio Amantis* to Be Read', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 24 (2002), 209–35, at pp. 230–31; for Clanvowe, see V.J. Scattergood, 'Introduction', in *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. Scattergood (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 9–31, at pp. 25–26; for Oton, see Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity*, p. 270; for Chandos Herald, see J.J.N. Palmer,

Despite the crowd, Philippa seems to have been a well-loved child; Gaunt's *Registers* record many gifts to her.[12] Peter Russell describes her as the duke's 'favourite daughter'.[13] In later years Gaunt encouraged peace-making efforts with France – according to Froissart – 'principally for the love of his two daughters the queen of Spain and the queen of Portugal'.[14] Gaunt's *Registers* also support Carolyn Collette's suggestion that women played a larger part in the Gaunt household than some current theorists suppose normal for the time.[15] One important piece of evidence is the fact that Gaunt had his daughters taught to read and write.[16] With poets and dons in and out of the Savoy, Philippa grew up, as it were, witnessing textuality on the hoof. Intelligent and of an intellectual bent herself, she would have caught the sense of ideas and stories in free play, a sensibility reflected in her later career of cultural ambassadorship. As Nicola McDonald points out, Philippa was a charter member of the Ricardian 'Garter sorority', a group of women – many of them close to John of Gaunt – to whom Richard II awarded membership in the Order.[17] This 'sorority', McDonald posits, typified the

'Froissart et le Héraut Chandos', *Le Moyen Age* 88 (1982), 271–92; for Gower, see Lynn Staley, 'Gower, Richard II, Henry of Derby, and the Business of Making Culture', *Speculum* 75 (2000), 68–96; for Chaucer, see Walker, *The Lancastrian Affinity*, p. 266.

12 *John of Gaunt's Register, Part I (1371–1375)*, 2 vols, ed. Sydney Armitage-Smith, Camden 3rd ser., vols 20–21 (London, 1911), 2.191, 193, 296; *John of Gaunt's Register, 1379–1383*, 2 vols, ed. Eleanor C. Lodge and Robert Somerville, Camden 3rd ser., vols 56–57 (London, 1937), 1.110, 111, 179, 230, 231; 2.297; Mary Anne Everett Wood, ed., *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 3 vols (London, 1846), 1.78.

13 P.E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford, 1955), p. 526.

14 '. . . bien plaisoit au duc de Lancastre le mariage et l'aliance de ce mariage [Richard II's marriage to Isabel of France, in 1397], principalement pour l'amour de ses deux filles la royne d'Espaigne et la royne de Portingal' (Jean Froissart, *Oeuvres: Chroniques*, 25 vols, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove [Brussels, 1870–77], 15.238; see also 15.109, 16.81–82). Froissart is an important source for several aspects of Philippa's life, but modern historians do not always find him reliable. My guidelines in using him have been to support his statements with other contemporary evidence where available, to follow the lead of modern historians in crediting or discrediting any particular assertion, and to hedge with an 'allegedly' or other such term when reproducing the exact words he puts into someone's mouth. In the case of Gaunt's concern over his daughters, for example, Froissart's analysis is supported by Christopher John Phillpotts, who notes that Gaunt 'favoured a peace with France to ensure the continued receipt of his pension and the position of his two daughters, Philippa and Catalina. . . . This was to remain a motive throughout the 1390s' ('John of Gaunt and English Policy Towards France 1389–1395', *Journal of Medieval History* 16 [1990], 363–86, at p. 368).

15 Carolyn P. Collette, 'Joan of Kent and Noble Women's Roles in Chaucer's World', *Chaucer Review* 33 (1999), 350–62, at p. 362, n. 25.

16 Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt*, p. 415.

17 McDonald, 'Chaucer's *Legend*', pp. 27–29. In 1379, the Order inducted John of

courtly ladies who would have made up one important component of Chaucer's audience – 'an elite group of literate women, familiar with the rules of public and coterie performance and not innocent of play's erotic potential'. Philippa's appearance in ballade 765 gives her special prominence, placing her 'in precisely the environment (courtly and textual) in which Chaucer locates the *Legend*'.[18] Although Philippa is better known for her serious side – reflected in later comments on her piety and Bible-reading – the ludic spirit McDonald hypothesizes can be seen in her willingness, according to the chroniclers, to relax 'with her maidens in those lawful games in which no trickery could be involved and which were seemly for any honest person', and in her patronage of the *jogral* Juda Negro, author of satirical court verses and 'a great troubadour according to the ballads of that period'.[19]

Before she became queen of Portugal, Philippa was a prospective bride at least five times. For lack of other marriageable daughters among the royals at this period, she seems to have been the default offering when treaties were being concluded or alliances sought. Much as he loved her, her father – who controlled English policy for much of this period – seems to have been always ready to barter Philippa's hand for the political advantage of the moment. As cold-blooded as these matings seem, however, it is worth noting that the links they created were thought to be affective as well as political. '[N]o union can be formed between children without great intimacy and affection of the parents being the consequences', noted the French admiral and diplomat Jean de Vienne, in explaining royal opposition to the proposed marriage of Gaunt's daughter Catherine to Enrique of Castile.[20]

As far as my research has discovered, the first marriage contract signed on Philippa's behalf was with the redoubtable Gaston-Fébus, count of Foix.

Gaunt's wife, Constanza, as well as Philippa and her sister Elizabeth. John's daughter with Constanza, Catherine, was inducted in 1384; his mistress, Katherine Swynford, in 1387; and Mary of Bohun, wife of Henry of Derby (his son by Blanche of Lancaster), in 1388. Hugh E.L. Collins, *The Order of the Garter, 1348–1461: Chivalry and Politics in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 301–2.

18 McDonald, 'Chaucer's *Legend*', pp. 28–29.

19 '. . . despaçar com suas domzellas em jogos sem sospeita demgano licitos e conuinhaaues a toda onesta pessoa' (Fernão Lopes, *Crónica del Rei Dom João de Boa Memoria*, ed. and trans. Derek W. Lomax and R.J. Oakley, in Lomax and Oakley, eds, *The English in Portugal, 1367 87* [Warminster, UK, 1988], pp. 236–37); 'Yuda Negro, que era gramde trobador segumdo as trobas daquelle tempo' (Gomes Eannes de Zurara, *Crónica da tomada da Ceuta por el rei D. João I*, ed. Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira [Lisbon, 1915], p. 93; translated in A.H. de Oliveira Marques, *Daily Life in Portugal in the Late Middle Ages*, trans. S.S. Wyatt [Madison, 1971], p. 257).

20 '. . . car ils dient ainsi, et vray est, que on ne puet marier ses enffans sans conjonction et aliance de grant paix et amour' (Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 13.294). The English translation is from Jean Froissart, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries*, ed. and trans. Thomas Johnes (1805; rpt New York, 1880), p. 491.

Philippa's father was in Gascony, trying both to defend that English territory from French incursions and to promote his Spanish ambitions. Between March 19 and 20, 1374, he negotiated two agreements with the count of Foix. One specified that Philippa would marry the count's only son, Gaston, on condition that Gaston-Fébus would aid Gaunt in his war against Enrique of Trastamare and that Gaunt would give the count 24,000 gold francs. In the other, Gaston-Fébus undertook to lend Gaunt 12,000 florins, accepting the castle of Lourdes as collateral.[21] Perhaps Gaunt thought a successful invasion of Castile would enrich him enough both to pay the dowry and refund the loan, but in the event neither invasion nor wedding took place; by late 1374 Gaston had reverted to neutrality.[22] This was probably just as well, as a few years later the count murdered the prospective bridegroom, his son, on suspicion of treachery.[23]

The next prospective husband for Philippa was closer to home – too close, as it turned out. According to Froissart, Gaunt 'would willingly have seen the king, his nephew, married to his daughter, whom he had had by the lady Blanch of Lancaster'. This was in about 1379, when the king's council was considering potential brides for Richard II. Fortunately, the other council members argued that 'the people would not have consented to this for two reasons; that the lady was his [the king's] cousin-german, and too nearly related; and that they wished the king to choose a queen from beyond sea, in order to gain stronger alliances'. In the event, they settled on Anne of Bohemia.[24]

John's next proposed husband for Philippa was a pretender duke of Brittany. The English had been backing one claimant to that duchy, Jean de Montfort, and holding prisoner his rival Jean de Bretagne, heir to the other claimant, Jeanne de Penthièvre. In 1380 the earl of Buckingham was sent with a small army to help Montfort; instead, he ignored their presence and made a treaty with the new king of France, Charles VI. The highly offended Buckingham returned to England in May 1381,[25] where the equally outraged

21 P. Raymond, ed., *Inventaire-Sommaire des archives départementales antérieures à 1790: Basses-Pyrénées, Archive civile, série E. no. 1 à 1765*, vol. 4 (Paris: Dupont, 1867); respectively, p. 117 (fonds E410) and p. 80 (fonds E302).

22 Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 191–93.

23 <http://21.1911encyclopedia.org/F/FO/FOIX.htm> (1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

24 'Li dus de Lancastre euist volentiers veu que li rois ses cousins euist pris sa fille que il eut de madame Blance de Lancastre, sa première femme; mais li païs ne le voloit mies consentir pour deus raisons: li une estoit que la dame estoit sa cousine giermainne, che par quoy estoit trop grant proïsmeté, et li autre que on voloit que li rois se mariast oultre le mer pour avoir plus de aliances' (Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 9.212; trans. Johnes, p. 258).

25 Michael Jones, *Ducal Brittany 1364–1399: Relations with England and France During the Reign of Duke John IV* (London, 1970), pp. 20, n. 2 and pp. 90–91.

king summoned Jean de Bretagne to his council. You can have the duchy, he was told – if you will agree to hold it from the king of England. As a sweetener, and no doubt with a view to securing English interests in Brittany, John of Gaunt offered him his daughter as wife. Jean's reply dashed Philippa's third chance at matrimony. '[H]e would never consent to such a treaty', he declared – according to Froissart – 'nor be an enemy to the crown of France: he would willingly accept of the daughter of the duke of Lancaster, but he must first have his liberty'. At this, he was returned to prison.[26]

Any further matrimonial schemes were interrupted, a month later, by the Peasants' Revolt. It is not clear where Philippa was while the Savoy was being sacked and set on fire. Gaunt himself was in the North negotiating with the Scots; her brother Henry was with Richard in the Tower. If Gaunt's favorite daughter was with her stepmother, she would presumably have witnessed if not shared the terror that set Constanza fleeing (probably from Hertford) to Gaunt's castle at Pontefract. The frightened garrison didn't dare admit the duchess and her household, who had to carry on by night to the more northern castle of Knaresborough, where they were at last admitted to safety.[27]

Negotiations for Philippa's next betrothal began two years later, when she was 23.[28] I will follow these transactions closely, since the timing helps to contextualize the composition of Deschamps' ballade 765. Records show that on September 26, 1383, Chandos Herald was paid 20 guilders for an embassy to Albert I Wittelsbach, duke of Bavaria and acting count (due to his brother's insanity) of Hainaut and Holland (see Figure 1). Gaunt had his eye on the duke's heir William, count of Ostrevant, alliance with whom, as Anthony Tuck notes, 'would not only have strengthened English influence in the Low Countries but would have brought the Low Countries' branch of the Wittelsbach family more firmly within the Anglo-imperial orbit'.[29] The Anglo-Flemish negotiations began in earnest at Calais, apparently with Gaunt (and perhaps Philippa) present. On April 26, 1384, Albert's ambassadors sailed to England to finalize agreement on the dowry (30,000 marks). A

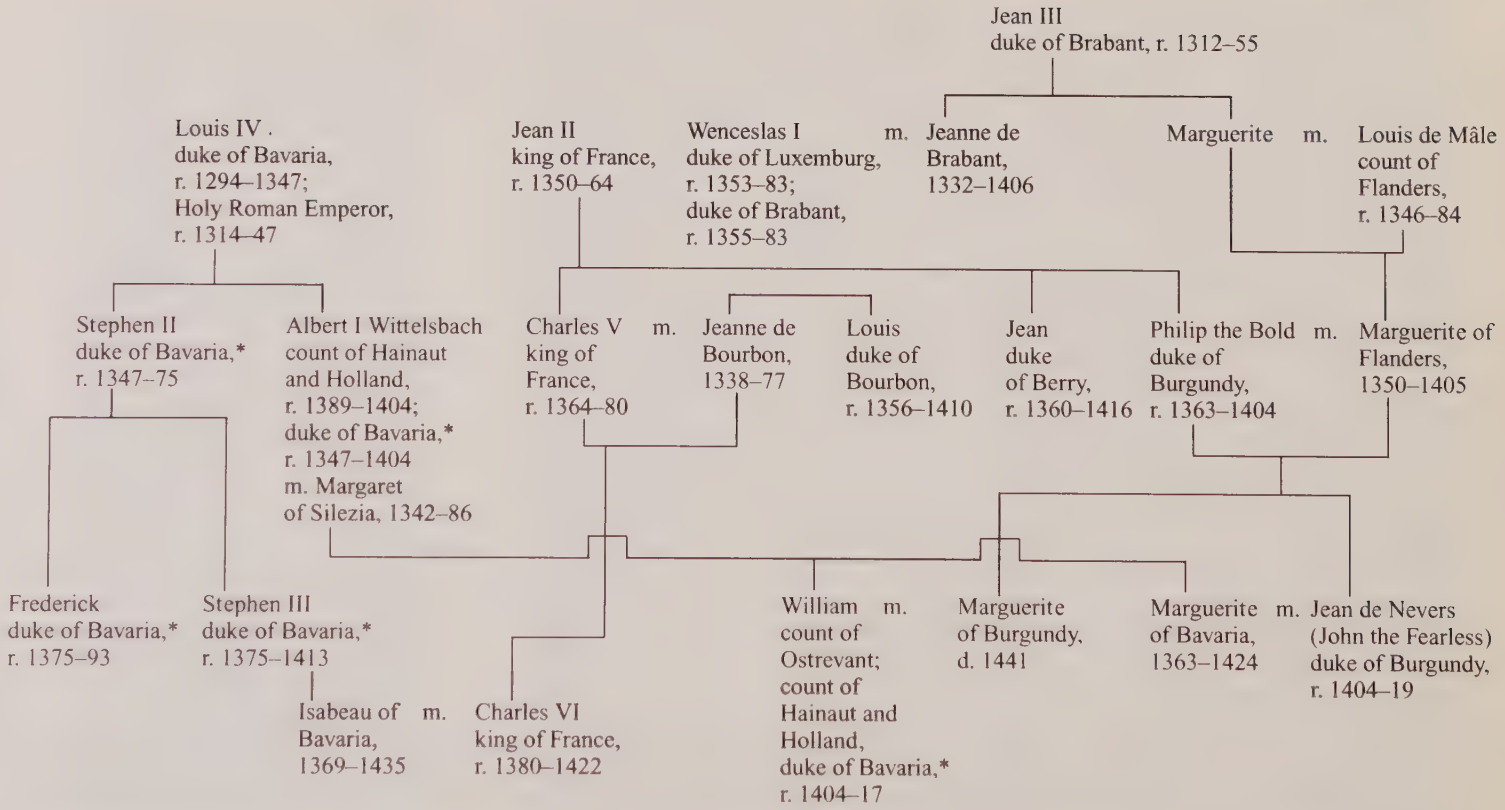
26 'Jehan de Bretaigne respondi que jà ne feroit ce traittié, ne se seroit ennemy, ne contraire à la couronne de France; il prendroit bien à femme la fille au duc de Lancastre, mais que il fust délivré d'Angleterre. Or fut-il remys en prison' (Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 12.63; trans. Johnes, pp. 417–18, quote from p. 418; see also Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, p. 187). Jean was eventually freed, in 1388, by the efforts of the constable of France, Olivier de Clisson, whose daughter he then married (Jones, *Ducal Brittany*, p. 106).

27 Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 248–50; Henry Knighton, *Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnitthon, Monachi Leycestrensis*, 2 vols, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby, Rolls Series 92, pts 1–2 (London, 1889, 1895; rpt 1965), 2.144.

28 J.J.N. Palmer, *England, France and Christendom, 1377–99* (London, 1972), p. 67.

29 Anthony Tuck, 'Richard II and the House of Luxemburg', in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, ed. Anthony Goodman and James Gillespie (Oxford, 1999), pp. 205–29, at p. 224.

Figure 1. Bavarian, French, and Flemish alliances



* There are multiple dukes of Bavaria within a given time period because the dukes had established a practice of dividing the title among the male heirs.

month later, however, Albert sent a message telling the ambassadors to postpone the planned wedding and return to him; negotiations were completely broken off in September 1384.[30] The proposed alliance had caused severe ripples at home. Out of loyalty to France, according to Froissart – then in service at the court of Brabant[31] – Duchess Jeanne de Brabant had set about unmaking the English-Flemish alliance.[32]

Jeanne appealed to Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, urging him to offer Albert his daughter Marguerite of Burgundy as an alternative wife for William. Jeanne, Philip, and Albert met at Cambrai in January 1385, where Philip – who gets credit for the entire scheme from most modern historians[33] – agreed not only to the proposed marriage but also (eventually) to the marriage of William's sister, another Marguerite, to his heir, Jean de Nevers ('John the Fearless').[34] The contract for William's marriage to Marguerite of Burgundy was signed on January 25, 1385.[35] The indignant Gaunt sent George Felbrigg, knight of the king's chamber, and Hugh Fastolf, on February 11, to remonstrate with Duke Albert.[36] To no avail: the double wedding took place at Cambrai on April 12, 1385. Instead of Philippa, the 20-year-old William found himself married to a 10-year-old bride; his 22-year-old sister did little better, having acquired a husband of 13.[37] Gaunt's ambassadors arrived back in England the day after the double marriage had taken place,[38] bearing what Anthony Tuck calls Albert's 'dusty answer':[39] 'My friends', the duke allegedly said, 'tell my cousin [Gaunt], that when he marries any of his children, I shall never interfere: he therefore need not trouble himself about

30 Magdi Tóth-Ubbens, 'Een Dubbel Vorstenhuwelijk in het jaar 1385', *Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 19 (1964/65), 101–28 at pp. 103–4.

31 Alexandre Pinchart, 'Etudes sur l'histoire des arts au moyen âge: La Cour de Jeanne et de Wenceslas, et les arts en Brabant pendant la seconde moitié du XIV^{e} siècle', *Revue trimestrielle*, 13th volume, 4th year, 1st tome (1857), 25–67 at pp. 37–39.

32 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 10.306–14.

33 E.g., Palmer, *England, France and Christendom*, p. 58; Tuck, 'Richard II and the House of Luxemburg'. The *Istore et croniques de Flandres* supports Froissart in also giving Jeanne credit for arranging the Cambrai weddings (*Istore et croniques de Flandres, d'après les textes de divers manuscrits*, vol. 2, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove [Brussels, 1880], p. 384). For a modern Flemish view of the whole affair, which also takes a strong view of Jeanne's role, see Henri Laurent and Fritz Quicke, *Les Origines de l'état bourguignon: L'Accession de la maison de Bourgogne aux duchés de Brabant et de Limbourg, 1383–1407*, pt 1: *Jusqu'à l'acquisition du duché de Limbourg et des terres d'Outre-Meuse (1383–1396)* (Mémoires de l'Academie royale de Belgique, 2nd ser., vol. 41, fasc. 1; Brussels, 1939), pp. 118–36.

34 Laurent and Quicke, *Les Origines*, p. 124.

35 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 10.553.

36 *Les Ambassades Anglaises pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans: Catalogue Chronologique (1327–1450)*, ed. Léon Mirot and E. Deprez (Paris, 1900), p. 59.

37 Tóth-Ubbens, 'Een Dubbel Vorstenhuwelijk', p. 101, n. 1.

38 *Ambassades Anglaises*, p. 59.

39 Tuck, 'Richard II and the House of Luxemburg', p. 227.

mine, nor how I marry them, nor with whom, nor when'.[40] According to J.J.N. Palmer, 'the Cambrai weddings constituted the most serious political and diplomatic defeat suffered by England since the [Hundred Years'] war began, and perhaps the most radical alteration in the balance of power in Europe since the beginning of the century'.[41] It may be that the party who was sorriest to lose the English alliance, however, was the young William of Ostrevant, if a Flemish chronicle was correct in reporting that he 'amoit le fille au duc de Lenclastre' – he loved the duke of Lancaster's daughter.[42]

Though Philippa never met the next man, or boy, who was considered as her husband, her lovability may have played some part in her candidacy. Why else would the dukes of Burgundy, Berry, and Bourbon have considered an English princess as bride to their nephew, the 16-year-old Charles VI of France? It's true they thought first of a German alliance, to counterbalance Richard II's recent marriage to Anne of Bohemia. In late 1383, during the siege of Bourbourg, Charles's uncles were sounding out Frederick Wittelsbach of Bavaria about prospective Bavarian brides. Frederick didn't have a daughter, but he mentioned his pretty niece Isabeau, the 14-year-old child of his brother Stephen. Stephen, however, was reluctant to risk Isabeau's rejection by Charles, or his keepers. The uncles began to consider other candidates: the duke of Lorraine's daughter, who was about Charles's age, or perhaps the duke of Lancaster's daughter – but, says Froissart, they couldn't figure out how to arrange such a match while at war with England, and the idea stalled.[43] The little information we have from Froissart leaves the impression that the idea of marrying Philippa to Charles VI did not proceed from her father. Philip the Bold, deeply involved in the effort to avoid English influence in Flanders, would hardly have proposed Philippa as queen of France. Perhaps the idea came from Jean de Berry, who later sought himself to marry Philippa's half-sister Catherine.[44] If Jean never met Philippa, he may have picked up rumors of her character from those involved in the Flemish negotiations.

40 'Compains, dites à mon cousin que quant il a mariet ou mariera ses enffans, que point je ne m'en ensonnieray. Ossi ne s'a-il que faire d'ensonnyer de mes enffans, ne quant je les voel marier, ne où, ne comment, ne à qui' (Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 10.313; trans. Johnes, p. 342).

41 Palmer, *England, France and Christendom*, p. 58.

42 *Istore et croniques de Flandres*, 2.384.

43 '. . . et ossi on parloit dou mariage dou roy ailleurs, et se fust assés tos li rois accordé la fille dou duc de Loeraine, car elle estoit moult belle damoiselle et de son eage ou assés priès et de grant et noble génération de ceux de Blois, et ossi parlé fu de la fille dou duc de Lancastre, qu puis fu roine de Portingal, mais on n'y pooit trouver nul bon moyen pour leur guerre: si convint la cose demorer' (Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 10.347).

44 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 13.112–16, 126–28, 132–34, 276–81; Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 328–30.

At the Cambrai weddings, ironically, Charles's uncles put the question to Jeanne de Brabant, who dis-engaged Philippa for a second time by declaring a German alliance the most profitable and honorable for France. Jeanne finessed the issue of Duke Stephen's reluctance by inviting Isabeau to join her on a pilgrimage to St Jean d'Amiens. After a visit in Brussels, Jeanne sent the girl off to the count of Ostrevant, whose mother lectured her on proper courtly behavior while overhauling her wardrobe to French standards. Duly fortified and restyled, the Bavarian princess and her party headed for Amiens, where Jeanne, Charles, and his Uncle Philip were already in residence. The young king, who was clearly ready to fall in love with the first *damoiselle* they pointed him at, met Isabeau that Friday and married her, at his own insistence, the next Monday – i.e., July 17, 1385.[45] Deschamps cranked out a ballade for Isabeau too, once it became clear she was the choice as queen. Rather inelegantly, he declared her 'a most joyous pasture for a king' ('pour un roy tresjoieuse pasture').[46] '[A]nyone who could see her sweet portrait / would love her more than any living creature', he further swooned.[47]

Philippa's pair of nonstarter betrothals allow us to date the period during which she was potentially to become queen of France, and thus during which Deschamps would have written his ingratiating ballade 765. From September 1384 the Flemish match was at risk, although Gaunt did not give up on William of Ostrevant until the English embassy to Albert failed and the Cambrai weddings took place in mid-April 1385. Jeanne de Brabant gave her decisive verdict in favor of a Bavarian alliance for Charles VI at the Cambrai weddings, presumably ending consideration of any other potential brides. Somewhere between September 1384 and April 1385, therefore, Deschamps would have had reason to dedicate a ballade to Philippa of Lancaster as a 'flower fit for a king'. John Livingston Lowes speculated in 1905 that Deschamps handed the poem to John of Gaunt during truce negotiations in August and September 1384 at Boulogne, at which the dukes of Burgundy, Berry, and Bourbon represented French interests.[48] The stanza addressing

45 Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. de Lettenhove, 10.347–52, 356–57. For a slightly different version of how Charles came to marry Isabeau, see the Monk of St Denis (*Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. M. L. Bellaguet [Paris, 1839], pp. 356–61). The Monk makes no mention of Philippa's candidacy, perhaps because he had not heard about it, or else because he chose to suppress the idea out of dislike for the English.

46 Ballade 463, l. 18; Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 3.279–80.

47 '[Q]ui verroit sa doulce pourtraiture / Plus l'aymeroit que creature née'; ll. 15–16. Gaston Raynaud identified Mary of Hungary as the subject of this poem, but I.S. Laurie argues for Isabeau because line 15 seems to echo the Monk of St Denis' claim that portraits were created of three potential brides ('Eustache Deschamps: 1340(?)–1404', in *Eustache Deschamps, French Courtier-Poet: His Work and His World*, ed. Deborah M. Sinnreich-Levi [New York, 1998], pp. 1–72, at pp. 16–17).

48 John Livingston Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* Considered in Its

Philippa may imply that Deschamps had specific knowledge of her whereabouts when the poem was written: if you want to know where she is, he says, go look in Albion; you'll find her in Lancaster.[49] Obviously, this is information Deschamps could have obtained from Gaunt. Another clue that might place the poem's origin at these negotiations is the poet's request, at line 37, that his friend Guillaume de la Trémoille induct him into the Order of the Flower. It would make sense for Guillaume to have been present in Boulogne, since he was a chamberlain to Philip of Burgundy.[50] Perhaps Deschamps' invocation to Guillaume, in ballade 765, suggests that he wanted the chamberlain to act as intermediary, handing the poem to the English duke. Perhaps, even, the idea of Orders of Flower and Leaf was influenced, in the vicinity of John of Gaunt, by thoughts of the Order of the Garter founded by John's father – an order of which both Gaunt and his daughter were members. Ballade 765 is, in fact, the only one of Deschamps' four Flower and Leaf poems that attaches the idea of an Order to either element.[51] If I am correct in speculating that Berry sponsored Philippa's candidacy, it may also be true that he commissioned this poem, and used the occasion of these negotiations to present it to the prospective bride's father. At the – not very satisfactory – conclusion of the truce negotiations, Gaunt returned to England, where he presumably delivered Deschamps' poem to his daughter.

Though Philippa 'lost' Charles and the throne of France, one cannot help but think that the greater loss was Charles's. Isabeau fulfilled Deschamps' awkward association of her with a cow, neglecting and probably cuckolding her husband once he began his tragic career of intermittent insanity. As

Chronological Relations', *PMLA* 20 (1905), 749–864, at pp. 758–61; see also Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 287–88.

49 '. . . qui vouldra avoir la congnoissance / . . . du pais ou est sa demourance / Voist en l'ille d'Albyon en recoy, / En Lancastre le trouvera, ce croy' (ballade 765, ll. 41, 43–45).

50 William W. Kibler and Grover A. Zinn, eds, *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1995), p. 925.

51 To my knowledge, no scholar has offered any explanation that covers all four Flower and Leaf poems. Although they all employ this motif, their nature varies. In Ballade 764 the poet lists the Flower's many virtues and declares himself her lifelong servant; presumably inspired by the *marguerite* poetry of Guillaume de Machaut (for which, see James I. Wimsatt, *The Marguerite Poetry of Guillaume de Machaut* [Chapel Hill, 1970]), the motif feeds into a more or less standard example of courtly verse. Ballade 765 speaks of Orders of Flower and Leaf, with the poet declaring again for the Flower, personified in the last stanza as Philippa of Lancaster. I would guess that Deschamps had here adapted the motif of Ballade 764 to the specific occasion or commission. In the two last poems the theme devolves increasingly into the humor characteristic of Deschamps' male-bonding drinking-society poems: Rondeau 766 seems to tease the French chamberlain, Hélion de Naillac, by nominating him as the '[s]weetest flower' ('Tresdouce flour'; l. 1), while Ballade 767 switches gears and argues for the Leaf, with an envoy urging an elite collection of French and Burgundian officials to join the poet in its praise.

Kerven de Lettenhove remarked dramatically in 1874, Isabeau 'brought as dowry to Charles VI and his people a half-century of domestic disorder and public calamity'.[52]

Rainha Dona Felipa

We have no record of Philippa's feelings, as marriage prospects came and went, and as she lingered in her single state long past the usual age. Gaunt was more expeditious in finding advantageous (if underage) mates for his other children (see Figure 2). Philippa's younger sister, Elizabeth, was married to the eight-year-old earl of Pembroke in September 1380. The arrangement was later annulled, when Elizabeth was seduced by and quickly married John Holand, earl of Huntingdon and duke of Exeter. Gaunt abducted a great heiress from under the nose of his brother Thomas, who had intended to make her a nun so his wife, her sister, could claim the whole of the Bohun inheritance. Instead, Gaunt married Mary de Bohun to his son, Henry of Derby, in July 1380, when the future Henry IV was 13 and his bride around 11.[53] By 1385, when her fifth prospective betrothal fell through, both of Philippa's younger siblings had been married for over four years. As son and heir, Henry had had his own wardrobe and chamber since 1375. Elizabeth received an independent establishment upon her wedding in 1380, leaving Philippa de facto mistress of her own household from late 1380 – though payments were still routed through Swynford.[54] The next year, however, Swynford retired to her estates; on September 7, 1381, Gaunt awarded the former governess an annual pension of 200 marks for her past service to Philippa and Elizabeth.[55] Young, independent, and one of the greatest ladies in England, Philippa may have enjoyed the freedom of her early twenties.

Matrimony loomed again soon, however, when Gaunt started on his final expedition to Iberia, determined to make himself king of Castile. Ambassadors from João I of Portugal had already approached the duke with offers of an alliance, to be sealed by marriage with one of his daughters. Gaunt set sail from Plymouth on July 9, 1386, taking with him his wife and three of his daughters – one married (Elizabeth, whose second husband acted as constable), and two available for dynastic mating (Philippa and her half-sister

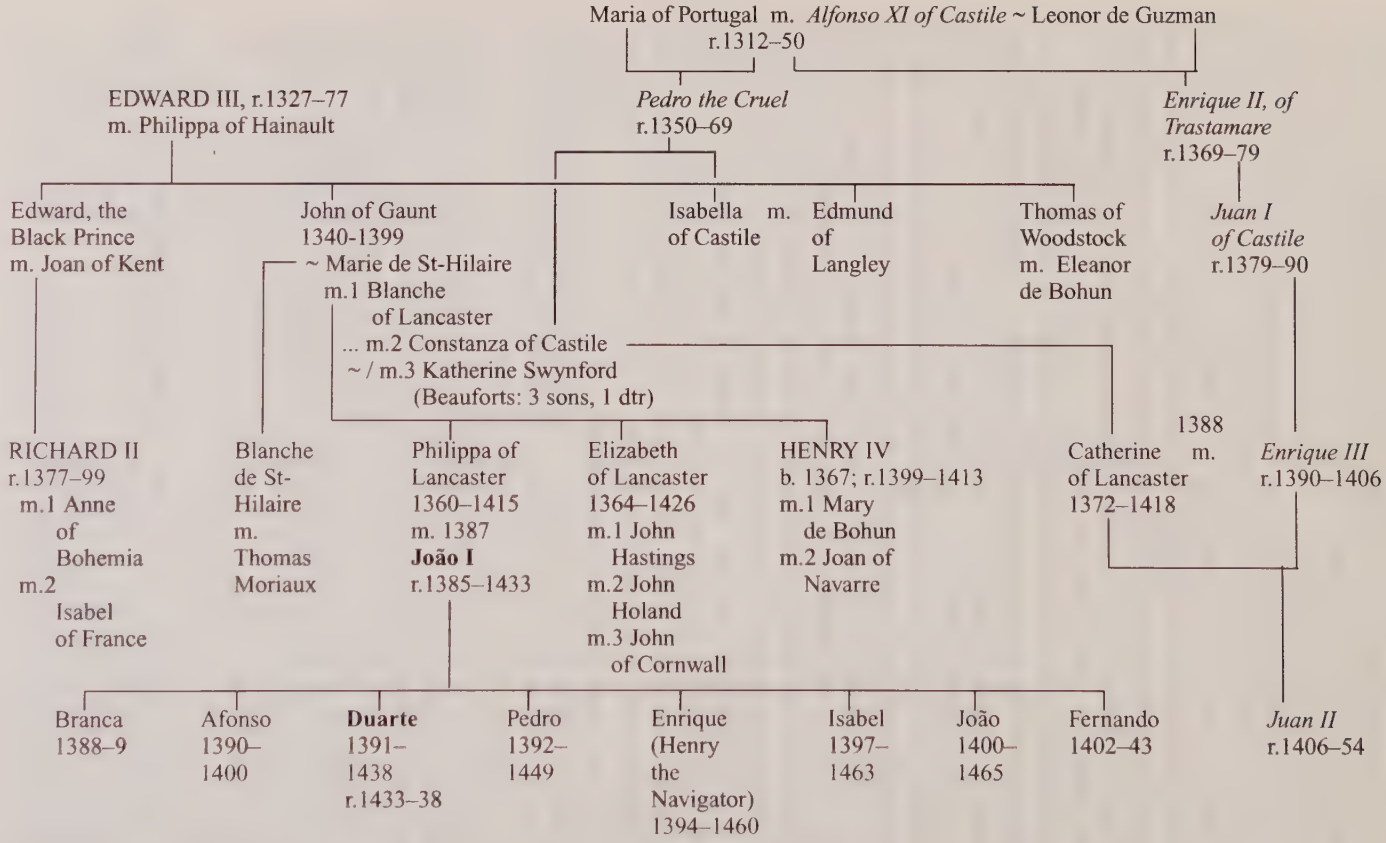
52 '[Isabeau] apportait pour dot à Charles VI et à son peuple un demi-siècle de désordres domestiques et de calamités publiques' (Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Histoire de Flandre*, vol. 3: *1383–1453* [Bruges, 1874], p. 6).

53 Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, pp. 275–76, 280.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 321; *John of Gaunt's Register, 1379–1383*, 1.132, 140.

55 *John of Gaunt's Register, 1379–1383*, 2.307; see also 2.366.

Figure 2. Lancastrian and Anglo-Iberian alliances



Kings of England in all caps; kings of Portugal in boldface; kings of Castile in italics.

Catherine, who as Constanza's daughter was heir to the throne of Castile).[56] After some maneuvering, Gaunt and João agreed on the latter's marriage to Philippa. Having failed to become the countess of Foix, the queen of England, the duchess of Brittany, the countess of Ostrevant, or the queen of France, Philippa of Lancaster thus finally found herself, on February 14, 1387, at the age of 26, queen of Portugal.

Gaunt's ambitions failed; the closest he came to the Castilian throne was the marriage he negotiated between the *infante* and his daughter, Catherine (on September 17, 1388). He and his remaining family and entourage returned to England in November 1389; he never saw either Philippa or Catherine again.[57] Left behind, however, Philippa thrived. It had been a long slog through the matrimonial market, and it took a while for the new spouses to become acquainted, but the marriage was a notable success. As the Portuguese chronicler Fernão Lopes remarked in his assessment of 'Rainha dona Filipa': 'God granted her a husband to her taste'.[58] João, the liberator of his country through his victory at Aljubarrota in 1385, was also a canny ruler and, like his new wife, pious and a lover of books. Apart from a liaison before his marriage that produced two children, João apparently spared Philippa the scandals of her childhood household, staying faithful to her until her death in 1415.[59]

If Philippa is little known to the English, she is famous among the Portuguese. Not only did she produce what the poet Camoens called a 'marvelous generation' ('inclita geração') of children (including a king, a regent, a famous duchess of Burgundy, a saint, and Henry the Navigator) (see Figure 2),[60] but she also won universal praise for her piety, grace, and good government.[61] The hints about Philippa's character that we can derive from William of Ostrevant's feelings for her, and perhaps from the fact that Charles VI's uncles considered her as the young king's mate, are amply borne out by the comments of Lopes and other Portuguese chroniclers. Of course, men writing for her sons would take care to praise the queen. But the praise is unanimous and detailed, and it persisted into later generations. They all remarked on her

56 Russell, *The English Intervention*, p. 417. For a fuller account of Philippa's marriage to João and career as queen of Portugal, see my 'Philippa of Lancaster, Queen of Portugal – and Patron of the Gower Translations?' in María Bullón-Fernandez, ed., *England and Iberia in the Late Middle Ages, 1200–1500* (New York, forthcoming).

57 Russell, *The English Intervention*, pp. 509, 524, 543.

58 'Deus outorgou marido comcordauell a sseu deseio'; Fernão Lopes, *Crónica*, ed. and trans. Lomax and Oakley, pp. 155–356, at pp. 236–37.

59 See Fernão Lopes, *Crónica del Rei Dom Joham I de boa memoria e dos reis de Portugal o decimo*, part 2, ed. William J. Entwistle (Lisbon, 1968), p. 3.

60 Cited in J. Goodman, *John of Gaunt*, p. 136.

61 Or, as the *Dictionary of National Biography* puts it: 'She enjoyed the reputation of a perfect wife and mother' (ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee [London, 1921–22], 15.1053).

piety. She prayed, she read the psalms, she fasted, she read the Bible. She cared for the indigent, donated to the church, and was a faithful wife and devoted mother. 'Nothing she did was done out of rancour or hatred', Lopes declares. 'On the contrary, all her actions were dictated by love of God and of her neighbour. Her conversation was plain, and often helpful without showing any pride in her royal rank; and her way of speaking was sweet, gracious and most pleasing to all who heard her'.[62]

Philippa also embraced her role as cultural ambassador, launching into an energetic importation of English culture. The famous Mosteiro de Batalha (Battle Monastery), in which she and João are buried, was built in a style that shows 'very strong English influences'.[63] And she started a fashion for English purses – a form of what we would now call textile art. A letter survives in which she thanks the bishop of Norwich for sending her these 'petitz burses', and asks for more since they are 'en deintee' among the Portuguese ladies.[64] Piety and enthusiasm for her culture of origin also incited Philippa to promote the English form of prayer among her Portuguese chaplains and associates. 'She always prayed the canonical hours according to the Use of Sarum', notes Lopes, 'and although this observance was by no means easy to arrange, she was so keen on this that she taught it to her chaplains and other worthy persons'.[65]

And finally, there is the English literature that found its way into Portugal during her watch. Some medievalists credit the translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* into both Portuguese and Castilian to Philippa's father or her brother, from 1399 Henry IV of England.[66] A recent article by Robert F. Yeager considers not only these candidates but also her half-sister, her son, her stepmother, members of her entourage, and English merchants

62 'Nom fazia cousa alguuma com ramcor nem odio, mas todas suas obras eram feitas com amor de Deus e do proximo. Em ella auia huuma chaã conuersaçam, proueitosa a muytos sem oufana de seu real estado, com doçes e graçiosas pallauras a todos praziuees douuir' (Lopes, *Crónica*, ed. and trans. Lomax and Oakley, pp. 236–37; see also José Soares da Silva, *Memorias para a historia de Portugal que comprehendem o governo del rey D. João I*, 4 vols [Lisbon, 1730–34], 1.309–10).

63 John Harvey, with Arthur Oswald, *English Medieval Architects: A Biographical Dictionary down to 1550* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1984), p. 152; see also Alice Berkeley and Susan Lowndes, *English Art in Portugal* (n.p., 1994), pp. 22–26.

64 M. Dominica Legge, ed., *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions from All Souls MS. 182*, Anglo-Norman Text Society 3 (Oxford, 1941), p. 372.

65 'Ella rezaua sempre as oras canonicas pello costume de Saresbri: e por o el seia nom bem ligeiro dordenar, assy hera em esto atemta, que seus capellaães e ourtras honestas pessoas reçebiam nelle pera ella emsinamça' (Lopes, *Crónica*, ed. and trans. Lomax and Oakley, pp. 236–37; see also Peter Russell, *Prince Henry 'the Navigator': A Life* [New Haven, 2000], p. 21).

66 E.g., Robert Warren Hamm, 'An Analysis of the *Confisyon del Amante*, the Castilian Translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*' (PhD dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1975), pp. 19–20.

resident in Lisbon.[67] It is a fine piece of patronage to lay claim to, since by this act, the *Confessio* became one of the first works of English literature to be translated into another language. A full consideration of the issue would far exceed the limits set for this article; it should be enough here to point out that most discussions of the translations acknowledge Philippa either as the patron or at least as the implementer of the project or the inspiration for work done on spec. It seems logical, furthermore, that an English princess noted for her bookishness and embarked on a policy of importing English culture would extend that policy to literature. The *Confessio*'s mix of entertainment and moral doctrine would make it an excellent choice in João and Philippa's court. Another suitable text would be the Pardoner's Tale – an analogue of which made its way into a late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century Portuguese religious treatise of which Philippa's two oldest sons each had a copy. Finally, Philippa may not have imported Arthurian literature – evidence suggests the Portuguese were reading the Vulgate cycle before she arrived. But her and her English household's presence must have encouraged the fashion of casting João as King Arthur and his knights as members of the Round Table.[68]

I hope to explore Philippa's Portuguese maecenate further in a future article;[69] but clearly all this activity, taken together, demonstrates that Philippa of Lancaster had an active interest in both devotional and recreational literature, and used the twists and turns of her marriage career to support and propagate texts along with other forms of cultural exchange. She is a supreme example of Bell's point that 'women acted as international ambassadors of cultural change through their distribution of books over a broad geographical area'.[70]

Philippa, Ballade 765, and Chaucer's Legend

Given the life and personality explored above, it should be at least feasible to suppose that Philippa of Lancaster did more than swoon in pleasure upon receipt of Deschamps' Flower and Leaf ballade. As remarked at the beginning of this article, students of the *Legend of Good Women* periodically note that Deschamps' poem names Philippa as the chief lady of the Order of the Flower. Surprisingly few scholars, however, connect this fact in any way with Chaucer's, or Richard's, knowledge of the cult.[71] George Lyman Kittredge

67 R.F. Yeager, 'Gower's Lancastrian Affinity: The Iberian Connection', *Viator* 35 (2004), 483–515. I am very grateful to Professor Yeager for supplying me with a preprint of this article.

68 H.V. Livermore, *A History of Portugal* (Cambridge, 1947), pp. 180–81.

69 See Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster'.

70 Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners', pp. 167–68.

71 E.g., John L. Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as Related to the French *Marguerite* Poems and the *Filostrato*', *PMLA* 19 (1904), 593–683, at pp.

gives an interesting example of the sort of dodge scholars take around the issue. Having concluded that ballade 765 'was sent to the Lady Philippa by Deschamps – or by someone for whom he wrote it', he continues: 'and in that case it may well have been seen by Chaucer'[72] – leaving the precise agency vague. Just as scholars seem reluctant to credit Philippa with the Gower translations, so they tend to detach her from the cross-fertilization of Flower and Leaf.

A similar critical discomfort manifests around the issue of Queen Anne's role in the *Legend*. No one can quite dismiss Alceste's injunction to give the finished book to 'the quene, / On my byhalf, at Eltham or at Sheene',[73] but the implication of a royal commission is softened by references to Anne as the 'dedicatee', for example. Or her involvement is flatly denied, as in Robert Worth Frank's statement of 1972: 'We know nothing about specific censorship or a royal directive or a queen's request'.[74] Notice is often taken of the parallels between the God of Love and Richard II, and between Alceste and Queen Anne. But the God of Love, in particular, comes off so poorly in most analyses that no one could imagine Chaucer responding to a commission with such a negative portrait of the commissioner(s).[75] Chaucer wrote the prologue(s), scholars say, as an allegory of poetry,[76] to express revolt against authority,[77] or very recently, to critique the labor laws he administered as a JP in Kent.[78] Most modern scholars simply dive into their analyses, leaving aside any consideration of why Chaucer undertook to compose a work of which he later grew so spectacularly bored.[79]

The diminution of both Philippa's and Anne's cultural authority can be interpreted as examples of the tendency, noted by Carolyn Collette in 1999

608–10, 640–41; Michael Hanly, 'France', in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford, 2000), pp. 149–66, at p. 156; McDonald, 'Chaucer's *Legend*', p. 29.

72 G.L. Kittredge, 'Chaucer and Some of His Friends', *Modern Philology* 1 (1903), 1–18, at p. 5; cf. Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*', p. 760.

73 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. A.S.G. Edwards and M.C.E. Shaner (Oxford, 1987), pp. 587–630; F Prol.: pp. 496–97.

74 Robert Worth Frank, Jr., *Chaucer and 'The Legend of Good Women'* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), p. 27.

75 E.g., Lee Patterson, 'Court Politics and the Invention of Literature: The Case of Sir John Clanvowe', in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (New York, 1992), pp. 7–41, at p. 11; David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 337–38, 354–55.

76 Lisa J. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the 'Legend of Good Women'* (Ithaca, 1983).

77 Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, 1991), pp. 237–43.

78 Kellie Robertson, 'Laboring in the God of Love's Garden: Chaucer's Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 24 (2002), 115–47.

79 E.g., Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales*; Perceval, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*; Andrew Galloway, 'Authority', in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford, 2000), pp. 23–39 , at pp. 34–36.

and already encountered in this article, 'to write noble women out of the courtly record'.[80] Andrew Taylor has recently offered a penetrating analysis of this tendency in regard to Anne's role in the *Legend*, concluding:

> The denial of the possibility of Anne's cultural authority by both Chaucer and Chaucerians seems too persistent to be attributed exclusively to an empiricist urge to avoid the untidiness of historical speculation. Instead, this dehistoricization might be seen as one aspect of the authorial construction of Chaucer, first as a poet rather than just a princepleaser, then as a voice of male detachment, humane wisdom, and down-to-earth English common sense; and finally as the forefather of the canon of English literature.[81]

In Philippa's case, too, credit for the initiative and influence of a powerful female is either shifted to a powerful male, or erased completely. This desire to focus all power and autonomy on the great man-poet seems to lurk behind the critical underappreciation of Philippa's role in the transmission of ballade 765.

Thus, although Philippa's is the only English name explicitly associated with the Flower and Leaf poem(s), the scenarios offered by scholars to explain Chaucer's references to those who 'ben with the leef or with the flour' (LGW, F Prol.: 72) invariably feature male protagonists – just like most of the scenarios offered to explain the translation of Gower's *Confessio*. One hypothesis suggests that Chaucer derived his comments directly from a court practice introduced by Richard, presumably in imitation of a similar game played in the French court.[82] However, not even among the better-documented French is there any evidence of such a cult in practice. A case in point is the *Lay de franchise*, Deschamps' report of a May Day celebration at Charles VI's Château de Beauté-sur-Marne in 1385. This is state-of-the-art French courtly *jouissance*, from the precise period of the *Legend*'s inauguration. In the poem Deschamps describes courtly groups, green attire, garlands and branches, jousting, love-vows, daisies, and all the other accoutrements of a courtly Maying.[83] At one point the ladies gather flowers, grass, and branches to fashion into belts and hats – but none of these plant-forms, nor the ladies wearing them, appear to be in any sort of competition.[84] It seems

80 Collette, 'Joan of Kent', p. 358.

81 Andrew Taylor, 'Anne of Bohemia and the Making of Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 19 (1997), 95–119, at p. 115.

82 E.g., Kittredge, 'Chaucer and Some of His Friends', pp. 1–2; George L. Marsh, 'Sources and Analogues of "The Flower and the Leaf" ', *Modern Philology* 4 (1906), 121–67 and 281–327, at p. 125, 142–43); Pearsall, 'Introduction', pp. 23–24; Perceval, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, pp. 313–18; Robertson, 'Laboring', p. 131.

83 Cf. Pearsall, 'Introduction', p. 28.

84 Eustache Deschamps, *Le Lay de franchise*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire (Paris, 1880), pp. 203–14; at ll. 118–23.

likely that if Charles's court *had* staged Flower vs. Leaf debates, they would have figured in this setting, and that Deschamps would therefore have mentioned them – especially if he were associated with their conception. Thus their absence from the *Lay* may suggest that the competition was confined to the virtual space of Deschamps' ballades. Richard may have set up teams of Flower and Leaf proponents in the English court, but if so he was probably imitating Deschamps' ballade(s), not actual French practice.

If Chaucer is assumed to have been influenced directly by Deschamps' ballade(s), scholars will explain the flow of those texts into the poet's hand by invoking a male intermediary: Richard, John of Gaunt, or Deschamps himself via Lewis Clifford. Or they feature no intermediary at all: the issue is not raised, or the scholar assumes that Chaucer got hold of the source poem(s) himself, in some unexplored fashion. I will consider each of these possibilities in turn.

If the person who gave the Flower and Leaf poem(s) to Chaucer was Richard, he probably obtained the original of his copy from Philippa. There is no evidence that the king had any dealings with Deschamps, and he was not a direct party to the negotiations over Philippa's marriage. John of Gaunt was unlikely to have passed the poem on to either Chaucer or Richard. In 1385 Gaunt was 45 years old and a serious man in the thick of state affairs. It is not impossible that he had a copy of ballade 765 made for the elegiast of his first wife, but on the whole it seems unlikely that the duke would have paid much attention to such a courtly trifle. Adding to the likelihood that Richard did not get the poem from Gaunt is the young king's suspicious and rebellious attitude to his uncle during the mid-1380s. This behavior surfaced first in May 1384 when, hearing from a probably crazed Carmelite friar that Gaunt was plotting to kill him, Richard instantly sentenced his uncle to death. Though he was dissuaded from rash action, the king's resentment continued to emerge in a series of further irritations and eruptions until February 1385, when he apparently supported a plot to murder his uncle. Even though the queen mother, Joan of Kent, got the two parties together on March 6 and induced them to make peace,[85] it doesn't seem likely that Gaunt and Richard would have been exchanging courtly ballades over this period.

If we assume, then, that Chaucer obtained a copy of ballade 765 himself, what are we saying exactly? Unless he had arranged for Deschamps to send him, or for an agent to obtain, a copy of every poem the French poet wrote, how would Chaucer have known that this interesting but incidental ballade existed? He would have had to hear about it from one of the family group involved. To say he obtained it himself would then mean, essentially, that he asked Philippa or Gaunt or Richard for a copy – unless we are to suppose that he made a surreptitious copy himself. Some scholars have yielded to the

[85] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, 1997), pp. 131–34; see also Collette, 'Joan of Kent', pp. 352–53.

temptation to pack the Flower and Leaf poems, along with the *Lay de franchise*, into the bundle of writings Deschamps sent Chaucer via Lewis Clifford, as famously noted in Deschamps' ballade 285 to Chaucer, the 'grant translateur'.[86] Ballade 285 has been dated everywhere from 1377 through 1396;[87] the only reason to assign Clifford's mission to 1385–86 is to get the Flower and Leaf poem(s) and the *Lay de franchise* to Chaucer in time for him to start writing the *Legend of Good Women*. But we know ballade 765 was already in the country, in the hands of people close to the poet. As regards the *Lay*, we should remember Jacques Kooijman's point that

> Chaucer imitated Lorris, Jean de Meun, Machaut, Granson, Froissart, without having received personal messages from these writers . . . and it could have been the same for Deschamps, already known to him and famous in royal courts, when he composed the *Lay de franchise*, a work in a genre specially crafted and designed for the greatest circulation.[88]

Unlike a random ballade or two, the *Lay de franchise* was a lengthy poem (312 lines) giving a detailed description of a major courtly entertainment. It was thus a text of considerable potential value to English people, such as Richard or Chaucer, interested in imitating French courtly practice and poetry.

Moreover, the Clifford hypothesis doesn't explain how Gower got his copy of ballade 765, or why else he would have had the lovers at the end of the *Confessio* bear garlands 'Some of the lef, some of the flour'.[89] One could easily say that Chaucer gave Gower a copy, but it is interesting that no one

[86] E.g., Kittredge, 'Chaucer and Some of His Friends', p. 6; Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*', p. 608; Hanly, 'France', p. 156. Ballade 285 is in Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2.138–39.

[87] Other proposed datings of balade 285 include between 1377 and 1380 (Jacques Kooijman, 'Envoi de fleurs: A propos des échanges littéraires entre la France et l'Angleterre sous la Guerre de Cent Ans', in *Etudes de langue et de littérature françaises offertes à André Lanly*, ed. Bernard Guidoux [Nancy, 1980], pp. 173–83, at p. 181); André Crépin, 'Chaucer et Deschamps', in *Autour d'Eustache Deschamps*, ed. Danielle Buschinger [Amiens, 1999], 37–43, at p. 39); the late 1380s (James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* [Toronto, 1991], p. 248); 1391 (Murray L. Brown, 'Poets, Peace, the Passion, and the Prince: Eustache Deschamps's "Ballade to Chaucer" ', in *Chaucer's French Contemporaries: The Poetry/Poetics of Self and Tradition*, ed. R. Barton Palmer [New York, 1999], pp. 187–215, at p. 188); and c. 1396 (Laurie, 'Eustache Deschamps', p. 51 n. 77).

[88] 'Nous dirons cependant que Chaucer a imité Lorris et Jean de Meung, Machaut, Granson, Froissart, sans avoir reçu de messages personnels de ces écrivains . . . il a pu en être de même pour Deschamps, déjà connu de lui et fameux dans les cours royales, lorsqu'il a composé le *Lay de Franchise*, pièce du'un genre tout specialement soigné et fait pour la diffusion la plus large' (Kooijman, 'Envoi de fleurs', p. 181).

[89] G.C. Macaulay, ed., *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols (EETS E.S. 81–82; London, 1900–1); *Confessio Amantis*, 8: 2468.

pursues the issue – presumably because, as argued above, modern scholars are invested in the image of each poet as an independent genius, rather than as collaborators or co-commissionees. While we cannot entirely dismiss the possibility of the Flower and Leaf poem(s) arriving from Deschamps via Clifford, therefore, we should recognize that there is no extrinsic evidence to date that mission to 1385–86. Indeed, the fact that Deschamps' praise is focused on Chaucer's translation of the *Roman de la Rose* supports the argument for an earlier date.[90]

We are left, thus, with the most obvious, and most ignored, candidate. For an affair of frivolity and youth, flowers and leaves, lovers and flirtation, it seems appropriate to look to the young. Philippa of Lancaster was 24 years old when she acquired her copy of ballade 765. She must have been charmed to receive an elegant complimentary poem from a famous French author. It would seem quite natural for her to pass on a copy to her 18-year-old cousin and her cousin's 19-year-old wife. If family tensions had disrupted her relations with Richard, they would presumably not have prevented her sharing the poem with her Garter 'sister', Anne. It seems equally likely that Philippa would give a copy to Geoffrey Chaucer, a familiar in her father's household since her childhood, whom she would have known would be interested in a new composition by Deschamps.

This hypothesis opens a further possibility. Richard in the mid 1380s was eagerly seeking to build an elegant court life modeled on that of France and Bohemia. 'By the spring of 1384', according to Gervase Mathew, 'there was already very clearly a court, and a court party with its programme'. Compared to his grandfather's household, Richard's court was not only 'much larger, but it had acquired a certain civilian character, a zest for fashion notable in its dress, and above all a formal and elaborate ceremonial which had earlier been lacking'.[91] Ruled by a 'sentimental and romantic'[92] boy-king very much in love with his wife, frivolity and flirtation played a considerable part in this court culture. 'The extension and renovation of the palaces of Eltham, King's Langley, and Sheen in the mid-1380s', says Michael Bennett – including, in some cases, the provision of dancing rooms – 'must testify to Richard's interest in providing a congenial setting for courtly dalliance'.[93] To this period belongs Thomas Walsingham's grumpy complaint that Richard's courtiers were more knights of Venus than of Bellona – 'more valiant in the bedchamber than on the field, armed with words rather than weapons,

90 Cf. Kooijman, 'Envoi de fleurs', pp. 180–81.

91 Gervase Mathew, *The Court of Richard II* (London, 1968), pp. 21, 18, 14.

92 Michael J. Bennett, 'The Court of Richard II and the Promotion of Literature', in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 3–20, at p. 10.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

prompt in speaking but slow in performing the acts of war'.[94] The situation Walsingham describes, however disapprovingly, seems like a natural seedbed of poetry – a place where amorousness and verbal dexterity were interdependent modes of self-promotion and amusement. We cannot say whether Richard actually created teams of Flower and Leaf proponents at court – there is no non-literary evidence that any ruler ever did so. But to imagine ballade 765 in Richard's hands is to imagine him excited by this new refinement of the cult of courtly love. If his cousin was accruing clever complimentary verses from major poets, he may have wondered, why shouldn't his beloved Anne? Hence, perhaps, parallel commissions to Chaucer and Gower.[95]

As this article has shown, Philippa of Lancaster was the means of textual migration and translation in no fewer than four countries and five languages. Very likely, she inaugurated her career of literary cross-pollination with the simple act of handing a French poem to an English poet – and perhaps as well to her cousin or her cousin's wife, who happened to be the king and queen of England. Philippa thus provided the snowball that set the Flower and Leaf avalanche, such as it was, in motion. Yet though simple, there is no reason to suppose the act was 'innocent' – i.e., performed without awareness of the channels along which literature and literary commissions flowed. Philippa of Lancaster was the granddaughter, daughter, mother, and grandmother of commissioning females.[96] Like them, she has shared the marginal or passive status assigned noblewomen in many modern accounts of the period. This article has been an attempt to reverse the process of female erasure, reasserting the centrality and activity of one particular, gifted woman of Chaucer's time and acquaintance.

94 'Et hii nimirum milites plures erant Veneris quam Bellonae, plus valentes in thalamo quam in campo, plus lingua quam lancea praemuniti, ad dicendum vigiles, ad faciendum acta martia somnolenti' (Thomas Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, vol. 2: *A.D. 1381-1422*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, Rolls Series 28, vol. 2 [London, 1864], p. 156). The translation is Scott Kleinman's, downloaded November 2003 from <www.vcsun.org/~kleinman/medieval/richaccounts.html>.

95 I have argued elsewhere, citing the same passage from Taylor, that both Chaucer's *Legend* and Gower's *Confessio* – along, possibly, with John Clanvowe's *Boke of Cupide* – are products of parallel commissions from Richard II (Joyce Coleman, ' "A bok for king Richardes sake": Royal Patronage, the *Confessio*, and the *Legend of Good Women*', in *John Gower: Essays at the Millennium*, ed. Robert F. Yeager [Kalamazoo, forthcoming]). The argument is not original, but a revival of one advanced in 1964 by John H. Fisher (*John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* [New York, 1964], pp. 236–50).

96 For Philippa of Hainaut (grandmother), see Kibler and Zinn, *Medieval France*, p. 374. For Blanche of Lancaster (mother), see Karen K. Jambeck, 'Patterns of Women's Literary Patronage: England, 1200–ca. 1475', in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens, GA, 1996), pp. 228–65, at p. 235. For Isabel of Portugal, duchess of Burgundy (daughter), and Queen Isabella of Portugal (granddaughter), see Charity Cannon Willard, 'The Patronage of Isabel of Portugal', in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, pp. 306–20.

Appendix: Deschamps' Ballade 765

(Eustache Deschamps, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, ed. Le Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire [SATF: Paris, Firmin Didot, 1884], pp. 259–61.)

Pour ce que j'ay oy parler en France
De deux ordres en l'amoureuse loy,
Que dames ont chascune en defferance,
L'une fueille et l'autre fleur, j'octroy
Mon corps, mon cuer a la fleur; et pourquoy?
Pour ce qu'en tout a pris, loange et grace
Plus que fueille qui en pourre trespasse
Et n'a au mieux fors que verde coulour,
Et la fleur a beauté qui trestout passe.
A droit jugier je me tien a la flour.

Celle doit on avoir en reverance,
Sy l'y aray; qu'en toutes choses voy
Loer la flour en bonté, en vaillance,
En tous deduis, en manniere, en arroy;
S'on scet rien bon, c'est la flour pour un roy.
En tous estas vient la fleur a plaisance:
De tout dit on, et par grant exellance,
Que cilz ou celle a la fleur sans retour
De quoy que soit, tele est l'acoustumance:
A droit jugier je me tien a la flour.

Amour la sieut [suit], doulz desir, esperance,
Beauté, bonté, et de tous loer l'oy.
Coulour, odour et fruit de souffisance
Viennent de ly. Maiz mie n'aperçoy
Que la fueille ait nulle vertu en soy,
Ne que douçour, fruit, ne grant plaisir face.
Naiz maintes foys apalit et efface.
Ne rien ne voy en li de grant vigour
Fors de couvrir la fleur dessus sa place:
A droit jugier je me tien a la flour.

Celle humble flour aray en remenbrance
Qui tant noble est, humble et de maintien coy
Que n'est tresor, pierre, avoir ne finance,
Qui comparer peust a li par ma foy.
Son ordre prain et humblement reçoy,
Qui plus digne est d'esmeraude ou topace:
Guillaume Fay, La Tremouille, or li place
Que du porter me face tant d'onour;
Car ordre n'est qui plus mon cuer solace.
A droit jugier je me tien a la flour.

Et qui vouldra avoir la congnoissance
Du tresdoulx nom que par oir congnoy
Et du pais ou est sa demourance
Voist en l'ille d'Albyon en recoy,
En Lancastre le trouvera, ce croy.
P. H. et E. L. I. P. P. E. trace,
Assemble tout; ces .viii. lettres compasse,
S'aras le nom de la fleur de valour,
Qui a gent corps, beaux yeux et douce face.
A droit jugier je me tien a la flour.

L'ENVOY
Royne d'amours, de douce contenance,
Qui tout passez en senz et en honnour,
Plus qu'a fueille vous faiz obeissance:
A droit jugier je me tien a la flour.

Translation

Note: The French is sometimes difficult and ambiguous; I have tried to translate as literally as possible without producing overly awkward lines.

Because I have heard people speak in France
About two Orders in the amorous law,
For which ladies each have their preference,
The one choosing the Leaf and the other the Flower – I offer
My body and heart to the Flower. And why?
Because in everything she has precedence, praise, and grace –
More than the Leaf that crumbles to powder
And at the very best has only green color –
While the Flower has beauty that surpasses all.
Judging rightly, I hold with the Flower.

It is she we should hold in reverence,
And thus I will; for in all things I see
The Flower praised: for goodness, for worthiness,
For every delight, for conduct, for bearing;
Anyone who knows what's good sees the Flower is fit for a king.
In every rank the Flower leads to pleasure:
Everywhere it is said, and loudly proclaimed,
That he or she has the Flower, without denial
Of anything; such is the custom.
Judging rightly, I hold with the Flower.

Love follows her, sweet desire, hope,
Beauty, goodness, and the praise of all I hear.
Color, odor, and fruit in sufficiency
Come from her. But I can hardly see

That the Leaf has any virtue in itself:
It gives neither sweetness, fruit, nor great pleasure.
Rather, many times it fades and falls away.
Nor do I see it having any great power –
Other than to cover the Flower above its place.
Judging rightly, I hold with the Flower.

This humble Flower I will keep in memory –
Which is so noble, humble, and gently mannered.
There is no treasure, stone, riches, or gift
That can compare with her, by my faith.
Her Order I take and humbly receive,
Who is more worthy of emerald or topaz:
Guillaume Fay, la Trémouille, may it please him
To do me the great honor of supporting me,*
For there is no Order that soothes my heart so much.
Judging rightly, I hold with the Flower.

And who would wish to have knowledge
Of the very sweet name that I know from hearsay
And of the country where she dwells,
May look in the isle of Albion, hidden away.
In Lancaster you will find her, I trust.
Trace the letters P. H. and E. L. I. P. P. E.,
Assemble them all; these eight letters construe,
You will have the name of the worthy flower,
Who has slender body, beautiful eyes, and sweet face.
Judging rightly, I hold with the Flower.

THE ENVOY
Queen of Love, of sweet countenance,
Who surpasses all in sense and honor –
More than to the Leaf, I make obeissance to you:
Judging rightly, I hold with the Flower.

* Lines 37–38 can be read – and have been read, by scholars of Old French literature whom I have consulted – in two different ways. One is as presented here, where Deschamps asks Guillaume to induct him into the Order of the Flower: rendered literally, 'that now it would please him to do me the great honor of supporting me [in my application to the Order]'. The other reading would have Deschamps inviting Guillaume to join: literally, 'that now it would please him to take it [this Order, which] would do me so much honor'. The issue is whether 'porter', in line 38, means 'support' or 'take, carry'. I have chosen the first reading, since it distracts less from the main business of the poet praising the Flower.

3

Ricardian Dreamwork: Chaucer, Cupid and Loyal Lovers

ROBERT R. EDWARDS

Chaucer is famously a poet of indirection. For many generations of readers and critics, his distance from the public events of the later fourteenth century is a necessary condition and final measure of his aesthetic achievement and universal appeal. In most traditional appreciations, Chaucer belongs to his age yet somehow stands above it as a writer of genius released from history and contingency. Marie Borroff, in her recent studies of Chaucerian judgment and silent retribution, gives a superb accounting of Chaucer's 'cautious self-protectiveness', which renders his appraisals of characters and events by implication and omission.[1] For other critics, Chaucer's posture toward contemporary events distinguishes him, not always admirably, from the topicality and prophetic social engagement of Langland and Gower. Derek Pearsall's institutional sketch of Chaucer as 'a time-serving opportunist and placeman' is an intentional provocation designed to challenge our received version of a benign and detached poet, the father Chaucer invented by his late-medieval disciples and Renaissance heirs and the writerly Chaucer imagined by Dryden.[2]

To recover Chaucer in some historical context, we usually turn to the broad social and cultural forces that bear on his writing. Narratives of late medieval English history (the crisis of chivalry, changing forms of identity

1 M. Borroff, *Traditions and Renewals: Chaucer, the Gawain-Poet, and Beyond* (New Haven, 2003), pp. 3–77, at p. 4. I am grateful to Carolyn Collette, Patrick Cheney, Matthew Boyd Goldie, and Benjamin T. Hudson for their careful reading of this essay and their helpful suggestions for revision and additional sources. I also thank Stefania D'Agata D'Ottavi and Carlo Vecce for an earlier opportunity to rethink Chaucer's dream poetry in connection with their research project 'Il sogno raccontato nella letteratura' (Università di Macerata).

2 D. Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford, 1992), p. 8. For the fashioning of Chaucer as father, see A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 59–120, and S. Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England* (Princeton, 1993).

and social relations) frame his narrative poems and give us valuable critical leverage on them.[3] Recently, Helen Phillips has suggested that attention to linguistic registers, contemporary sociolects and the shifting polyphony of specialized discourses might provide ways of identifying Chaucer's engagement with contemporary social and political issues.[4] At one point in his mature work, however, we clearly sense Chaucer's unavoidable confrontation with power and the pressures of his age. I refer to the scene in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* in which the God of Love singles out the poet's persona for his special displeasure and censure while Queen Alceste comes to the narrator's support. Long regarded as a figure for Richard II, Cupid brings terrifying monarchical power to bear on the poet's work and his office within the narrative fiction of a dream vision.[5] He does so, as James Simpson has usefully reminded us, as a reader who enforces his desire through tyrannical control of an imagined textual community with an interpretive program that ostentatiously cancels authorial 'entente'.[6]

Chaucer's scene of confrontation is one in which the erotic is articulated as political, and politics activates poetic composition. Unlike 'thassise / Of love, which is al the chief / To kepe a regne out of meschief' in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (Prologue 148–50), love in this scene is not imagined as benign charity, a social instantiation of divine love that also connects the microcosm and macrocosm.[7] It is a passionate attachment directly joining Cupid and his followers in shared desires, felt allegiances and practice. The link between eros and politics explains how stories about love acquire an extraordinary social resonance and remain open to later interpretation. The

3 The most influential works in recent decades are L. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, 1991) for the crisis of chivalry; P. Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA, 1989) and D. Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, CA, 1997) for the emergence of new social relations; and C. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989) and E.T. Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, 1992) for the problematics of gender.

4 Helen Phillips, 'Register, Politics, and the *Legend of Good Women*', *Chaucer Review* 37 (2002–3), 101–28.

5 *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston, 1987), p. 1061, traces the identification of Cupid with Richard II and Alceste with Queen Anne to the origins of modern Chaucer scholarship – T. Tyrwhitt, ed., *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1775–78). The tradition that Anne commissioned the *Legend* derives from John Lydgate's reading of the Prologue; see Lydgate, *Fall of Princes* [Prologue, lines 330–6], ed. H. Bergen, 4 vols, EETS, ES 121–4 (London, 1924), I, p. 10. A.J. Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, Oxford Guides to Chaucer (Oxford, 1995), pp. 327 and 447, suggests contexts in which the *Legend* could be directed toward the queen without her commissioning it.

6 J. Simpson, 'Ethics and Interpretation: Reading Wills in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', SAC 20 (1998), 73–100 (pp. 79–82).

7 *Confessio Amantis*, in *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay, 2 vols (London, 1900), I, p. 8.

tales recounted in the *Legend*, like the Chaucerian narratives that precede them, turn on the motions of desire and the affective bonds between men and women situated in historical and social contexts. Those relations involve not only differences of gender but also differences in power, dominance, subordination, authority, influence and gratification. The poetry that represents them performs both literary and cultural work. Its richly imagined fictional worlds speak back to a public sphere that likewise negotiates its differences through language, spectacle, performance, ritual and symbolism. If poetry claims a separate space of imagination, play and freedom in Chaucer (as it does), it is read and interpreted in various other places; at least one of those places is the immediate historical world it escapes.

In the Prologue to the *Legend*, the overt topic is the poet's service to love. That service comes under intense symbolic scrutiny from Cupid precisely because so much is invested in it: the erotic is somehow the political and the political operates through poetic representation. I have argued elsewhere that the linkage among eros, politics and poetry involves a contest between a social and poetic text.[8] My focus then was authorial, and it privileged the dynamics of submission and resistance in courtly *makyng* and *endityng*. The focus in this essay is on the complementary dimension of reading and interpretation. The Prologue to the *Legend* offers an important vantage point on the processes for making and revising meaning in late medieval England. To analyze them, I propose to examine what the title of my essay terms Ricardian dreamwork. My inquiry begins with the differing language and forms of attachment expressed simultaneously as erotics and politics in the F and G versions of the Prologue. I turn then to the rhetoric and performance of royal anger and will as recorded in contemporary chroniclers and registered emphatically in the G Prologue. Finally, I examine the political imaginary of queenly intercession, which the Prologue initially holds out as a prospect for remedy but later makes a source of loss and mourning, the endpoint of desire, politics and poetry.

By evoking Freud's dreamwork I mean to indicate the structural overlap between the fictively private world of the dream vision and the textualized historical world of political performance. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud describes the mechanisms of condensation, displacement, symbolization and secondary revision that variously distort the content of unacceptable

[8] R.R. Edwards, 'Faithful Translations: Love and the Question of Poetry in Chaucer', in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. R.R. Edwards and S. Spector (Albany, 1991), pp. 138–53, at pp. 138–41 and 150–3. Kellie Robertson, 'Laboring in the God of Love's Garden: Chaucer's Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*', SAC 24 (2002), 115–47, argues that Chaucer's authorial self-definition can be connected to contemporary problems with defining labor, including literary labor, and to Chaucer's experience with labor cases brought before the commission for the peace in Kent on which he served in the mid-1380s.

desires. These mechanisms allow forbidden wishes to evade censorship and find expression in ways that obscure the responsibility of their author, their libidinal origins and the guilt associated with them. Freud's great contribution to hermeneutics is to locate significance not in the reconstruction of the original content as a kind of restored mosaic of lost meaning but in the ongoing dynamic of interpretation that establishes meaning.[9] The dreamwork is a process that operates amidst the shifting levels of conscious and unconscious experience in language and representation. Post-Freudian theorists have extended this insight beyond psychoanalysis to the social world. Slavoj Zizek contends that there is a 'fundamental homology' between Freud's analysis of dreams and Marx's analysis of commodity: 'the "secret" to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the "secret" of this form itself*'.[10] Meaning resides in the logic of relations rather than a radical point of origin.

Ricardian dreamwork, as I intend to use the term, provides a way of approaching Chaucer's poem in a historical context of interpretation. In a broad sense, the Prologue is a splendid example of secondary revision, which produces some measure of coherence and connectedness between dream elements in the dream as experienced and the dream as remembered.[11] Within the dream, symbolization appears in the image of the daisy, Cupid's menacing entrance, and the patterned arrangement of Cupid, Alceste and the nineteen ladies seated in the meadow. Condensation (the fusing of elements and identities) and displacement (the substitution of immediate events for more significant inner experience) are recurrent tactics for addressing and negotiating material that impinges on consciousness and finds its way to symbolic expression.[12] My aim is not, however, to align the mechanisms of Freud's

9 Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* is itself an ongoing project of interpretation. As Ritchie Robinson notes in his Introduction to S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. J. Crick (Oxford, 1999), p. xxxviii, 'A sign of the importance Freud . . . attached to this book is that he kept it up to date by adding new materials in each subsequent edition'.

10 S. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, 1989), p. 11.

11 Freud establishes an analytical principle for dream interpretation that subsequently must take account of the artificially synthetic qualities of dreams: 'we should regard the interconnectedness of the dream-components composed by the dream as inessential and illusory, and set it aside, for each individual dream-element should be traced back to its own source. The dream is a conglomerate which, for purposes of investigation, has to be broken up into fragments once more. However, on the other hand, we should bear in mind that a psychical force is expressed in dreams which creates this apparent coherence, that is, it subjects the material produced by the dream-work to *a second revision*' (p. 289).

12 Simpson, p. 93, offers a description of these particular mechanisms in discussing the *Legend*'s imposed formula of false men and true women: 'Cupid is quite prepared to have stories told of treacherous men as long as their treachery is not related back to

dreamwork with formal poetic devices used in the Prologue. The Prologue is after all a dream vision, not a dream, a stylized literary form directed rhetorically to a sophisticated courtly audience already experienced in reading the conventions of the form. Peter Brown remarks that the dream vision can serve as 'an instrument of radical analysis and evaluation': 'In some measure, the literary dream is the meeting-place of both [self and society], being at once intensely private and expansively public, providing a means whereby the outer world can be read through the inner.'[13]

If the Prologue processes forbidden materials and their attendant anxieties – the trauma of Cupid's indictment of the narrator suggests it does precisely that – these only pretend to be private, and their supposed disclosure is an enabling fiction required by the form. The key point to be grasped is that the dream materials and anxieties are actually public but they cannot be expressed directly. In the public arena, they, too, require distortion through the mechanisms of the dreamwork. For this reason, I want to avoid a simple alignment of the text with the historical record. The reconstruction of topical events alone cannot explain the dream vision any more than the recovery of latent content accounts fully for the work of analysis in Freud's interpretation of dreams. It is the discursive field shared by the poem and historical moments that matters.

My interest lies accordingly in the intersection between the confrontation scene with Cupid in Chaucer's poem and similar scenes as recorded in contemporary narrative histories. These histories, as G.H. Martin observes, divide generally between those written before and after Richard's downfall. They have differing means of compilation and differing ideological positions. Some of their positions are evolving rather than fixed. The St Albans chronicler Thomas Walsingham, as George B. Stow demonstrates, changed his views and revised his earlier texts as political pressure and advantage dictated.[14] Some chronicles escaped Lancastrian revision altogether.[15] Nonetheless, all the histories are concerned, as Martin says, with 'what people thought and supposed as well as with what they did'.[16] In other words, Chaucer's Prologue and contemporary chronicles do not sort neatly into poetry

Cupid himself. If that condition is observed, then a focus on suffering and faithful women serves a cupidinous desire for women who are only faithful and suffering'.

13 P. Brown, 'On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions', in *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 22–50, at p. 44.

14 G.B. Stow, 'Richard II in Thomas Walsingham's Chronicles', *Speculum* 59 (1984), 68–102, at pp. 83–4, 88–9, 91 and 100–1; and C. Given-Wilson, trans. *Chronicles of the Revolution, 1397–1400: The Reign of Richard II* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 4–5.

15 J. Taylor, 'Richard II in the Chronicles', in *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, ed. A. Goodman and J. Gillespie (Oxford, 1999), pp. 15–35, at pp. 16–19.

16 G.H. Martin, 'Narrative Sources for the Reign of Richard II', in *The Age of Richard II*, ed. J.L. Gillespie (New York, 1997), pp. 51–69, at p. 65.

and history, the imaginative and the real. Rather, they share the common ground of public, performative discourse. Chaucer's imagined scene with Cupid does the same kind of cultural and political work as the anecdotes of portents and curious monstrosities that find their way into chronicles as symbolic items circulating in the public sphere. In the Prologue, we can examine some of the demands and desires of royal authority under Richard II. Chaucer's linking of eros, politics and poetry allows us to read what may be at stake both in the writings of contemporary observers of the monarch and in a project of writing that Chaucer himself abandoned in the mid 1380s yet revisited in part a decade later – that is to say, a project, by definition, overdetermined in its investments for poetic composition and reception.

The G Prologue to the *Legend* necessarily holds a prominent place in this discussion because it is a work of authorial revision and poetic retrospect, though it also contains scribal interventions and corruptions from a later date of textual production.[17] Literary critics point out that G presents a tighter narrative structure than the earlier F Prologue; it clearly delineates the dream vision from the subsequent legends, rephrases and shifts certain passages and reduces the emphasis on the daisy as an organizing figure in the vision.[18] M.C. Seymour finds 'a much blunter sensibility' in G than in the looser structure and poetic expressiveness of F.[19] Seymour's remark here is intended

17 Janet Cowen and George Kane's summative view of G is that 'it uniquely preserves an authorial version of the *Prologue* copied by an immediate scribe notably subject to error'; see *Geoffrey Chaucer, The Legend of Good Women*, ed. J. Cowen and G. Kane (East Lansing, 1995), p. 139. J. Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards, 'The *Legend of Good Women*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. P. Boitani and J. Mann, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 112–26, at p. 115, raise the possibility that the G Prologue was written because Chaucer hoped to obtain 'support of a different patron from the one for whom the work may originally have been commissioned'.

18 The G Prologue poses interesting problems for editorial theory as well as literary criticism. Ralph Hanna notes that editors committed to the principles enunciated by W.W. Greg, Fredson Bowers and Thomas Tanselle would select G as the state of the text reflecting the author's last known intention; see R. Hanna III, 'Presenting Chaucer as Author', in *Medieval Literature: Texts and Interpretations*, ed. T. Machan (Binghamton, 1991), pp. 17–39, at pp. 27–8. Helen Phillips follows that line of argument by printing G as the base text for her edition of the Prologue in *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. H. Phillips and N. Havely (London, 1997). Recent discussion over the status of G as a text begins with G. Kane, 'The Text of *The Legend of Good Women* in CUL Ms Gg.4.27', in *Medieval Studies Presented to Norman Davis in Honour of his Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 39–58; and continues in his collaborative edition of the *Legend*. For a view that questions the status of G as an independent text, see J.A. Dane, 'The Notions of Text and Variant in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*: MS Gg, Lines 127–38', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 87 (1993), 65–80. S. Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women'* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 34–43, offers a skeptical view of the arguments made to establish the priority of F over G.

19 M.C. Seymour, 'Chaucer's Revision of the Prologue of *The Legend of Good Women*', *Modern Language Review* 92 (1997), 832–41, at pp. 835 and 836.

to be an aesthetic judgment, but it points us as well toward the mechanisms of a Ricardian dreamwork, the 'apparent coherence' of secondary revision. The G Prologue marks a complex return to the scene of royal confrontation. To the extent that it repeats and reformulates the F Prologue, its reworking is not an exercise in poetic invention isolated from a social and historical context. G provides a retrospective frame for the F Prologue; it is a revision that gives a different, even censored, formulation of the original materials yet incorporates, in equal measure, its own strategies of distortion and representation.

'Al my folk werreyest' / 'me werreyest'

The Prologue conveys a scene of indictment fraught with guilt and menace. The F and G versions explain the conflation of erotic, political and poetic trespass by offering what amount to different formulations of literary history and cultural reception. While recognizing formal differences in the Prologues, scholars have been less concerned with the work these formulations perform as ways of reading in the social sphere. In F, Cupid's indictment of Chaucer's narrator is based on two authorial transgressions:

> Thou maist yt nat denye,
> For in pleyn text, withouten nede of glose,
> Thou has translated the Romaunce of the Rose,
> That is an heresye ayeins my lawe,
> And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe;
> And of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyste,
> That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
> That ben as trewe as ever was any steel. (F327–34)

Cupid names the translation of the *Roman de la rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde* as the offending items, but Chaucer inscribes his own poetic desires in the bold gesture of Cupid's indictment. The *Troilus*, we should note, is described in both versions of the Prologue as a poem about Criseyde's betrayal and not Troilus's nobility. In F, it is positioned to complement the *Roman de la rose*, the most important vernacular text of medieval courtly culture, which Chaucer presumably translated earlier in his career.[20] The *Troilus* explains a context of reception for the *Rose*. The issue, as Cupid reads the texts, is erotic and political allegiance. The 'heresye' of the *Rose* supposedly induces 'wise folk' to withdraw from Cupid. The *Troilus* immediately glosses this betrayal as the consequence of making men lose their trust in women. The manuscript tradition gives us some indication of how care-

[20] In Fairfax 16, Bodleian Library MS 638 and Bodleian Library MS Tanner 346, the key term *translated* is omitted; in the 'Clerk's Tale' (IV.385), the term prompts a great deal of scribal variation.

fully Chaucer has situated the *Troilus* here in relation to the *Rose*. Two witnesses to the F Prologue – London, British Library Additional MS 9832 and Cambridge, Trinity College R.3.19 – omit lines 332 and 333: 'And of Criseyde thou hast seyd as the lyste, / That maketh men to wommen lasse triste'.[21] The effect of the omission is to make the *Rose* the narrator's sole transgression against Cupid and to transfer female virtue to Love's folk: '[Thou] makest wise folk fro me withdrawe, / That ben as trewe as ever was any steel'.

The G Prologue offers a still fuller suggestion of the impact of the *Troilus*. In his longest surviving passage of authorial revision (G 268–312), Chaucer dramatically amplifies the theme of female virtue. Cupid makes the conventional argument in defense of women that the textual record preponderantly supports their moral virtue: 'evere an hundred goode ageyn oon badde' (G 277). This pattern, he claims, extends across Greek and Roman books and their Christian redactors, who present a consistent model of death before dishonor: 'al the world of autours . . . / Cristene and hethene, trete of swich matere' (G 308–9).[22] In this revision, we see the *Troilus* not as a parallel or explanation for the *Rose* but as an item that has taken on significant cultural influence in its own right. In the restaged drama of Cupid's confrontation, the *Troilus* serves to mobilize a defense of women, provoke a wide-ranging consolidation of literary history and impose closure on further reflections on the question of women's virtue: 'It nedeth nat al day thus for to endite' (G 310).

In the retrospect of the G Prologue, then, the *Rose* and the *Troilus* have somehow forced a crisis in English court poetry by laying bare larger social and political anxieties about allegiance and fidelity. They betray Zizek's secret of the form itself. Sheila Delany notes, 'The offense pinpointed here is not misogyny but alienation of affection in general.'[23] As Michael Hanrahan points out, the charge of heresy and apostasy amounts to an appeal of treason, which conflates erotic and political betrayal.[24] It is a charge that

21 Cowan and Kane find BL Add. 9832 and Trinity College R.3.19 the most persistent grouping among the textual witnesses to the F Prologue (p. 22).

22 R.W. Frank, Jr., *Chaucer and 'The Legend of Good Women'* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), p. 33n suggests that the amplification in G replaces the passage later in F where Cupid refers to the other ladies from his entourage seated on the grass (F 554–62). J. Boffey, ' "Twenty Thousand More": Some Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Responses to the *Legend of Good Women*', in *Middle English Poetry: Texts and Translations: Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, ed. A.J. Minnis (York, 2001), pp. 277–97, points out that in the reception of the *Legend* the 'pak' of women is associated with the *querelle des femmes*, female counterparts to the Nine Worthies and the illustrations of Ovid's *Heroides*.

23 Delany, p. 102.

24 M. Hanrahan, 'Seduction and Betrayal: Treason in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*', *Chaucer Review* 30 (1995–96), 229–40.

Alceste reveals obliquely by an eager, wishful denial: 'no cause of deth lyeth in this caas' (F 409 and G 395). In the G Prologue, these overlapping senses of betrayal are brought together in another gesture of elegant denial that again belies its claims. Alceste comments that the narrator, 'Whil he was yong . . . kepte youre estat; / I not wher he be now a renegat' (G 400–1). *Renegat* can signify a religious apostate or a political traitor.[25]

Alceste's presence gives a particular grounding to the links between eros, politics and poetry in the Prologue's dreamwork. The most compelling, though inferential, argument for dating the G Prologue after F is the omission of Alceste's instruction: 'And whan this book ys maad, yive it the quene, / On my byhalf, at Eltham or at Sheene' (F 496–7).[26] In most readings of the poem, Anne's death in 1394 produced such a trauma for Richard that any subsequent revision would have to erase her direct presence.[27] On this view, the omission in G of the narrator's initial praise of the daisy is a diplomatic excision, particularly in its passionate conviction, which so closely resembles Richard's devotion: 'And I love it, and ever ylike newe, / And evere shal, til that myn herte dye. / . . . Ther loved no wight hotter in his lyve' (F 56–59). In some measure, Alceste resembles the elusive Margarite that Thomas Usk invokes, invests with erotic and social meaning but does not identify.[28] In the G Prologue Alceste becomes a distinctly memorial presence. Though Chaucer preserves the recognition scene where the narrator finally puts together the identities of Alceste, the daisy, the lady before him and, by implication, Queen Anne (F 510–34 and G 498–522), elsewhere he makes it clear that Alceste is recognized as a symbolic, distanced figure from the outset. The narrator names her as Cupid's queen, 'Alceste the debonayre' (G 178), when the entourage first approaches, and he inserts her name in the refrain to his Balade (G 209, 216 and 223): 'Alceste is here, that al that may desteyne'. She is named, too, at the beginning of her defense of the poet: 'Thanne spak Alceste, the worthyeste queene' (G 317).

These changes are expository, and they reflect a narrative perspective in which Alceste as Anne is no longer a personnage whose identity is to be dis-

25 *MED*, s.v. 'renegat': 'One who forsakes his religious beliefs, an apostate; also a traitor'.

26 J.L. Lowes established the prevailing modern view that F preceded G: see 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as Related to the French Marguerite Poems and to the *Filostrato*', *PMLA* 19 (1904), 593–683; and 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* Considered in its Chronological Relations', *PMLA* 20 (1905), 749–864.

27 Phillips, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 283, suggests that Adam Usk may have invented the tradition that Richard destroyed Shene out of grief at Anne's death. Usk reports, 'Quod manerium, licet regale et pulcherimum, occasione ipsius domine Anne mortis in eodem contingentis rex Ricardus funditus mandauit et fecit extirpari' (*The Chronicle of Adam Usk 1377–1421*, ed. C. Given-Wilson [Oxford, 1997], p. 18). Given-Wilson, *ibid.*, p. 19, n. 2, cites a writ of privy seal for the destruction, dated 9 April 1395.

28 A. Galloway, 'Private Selves and the Intellectual Marketplace in Late Fourteenth-Century England', *New Literary History* 28 (1997), 291–318, at pp. 295–6.

covered in the unfolding of the poem but a figure known and remembered. In literary models like Machaut's *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, the courtly dream-vision typically has a dual time scheme. Its narrative recounts imagined action and events that the dreamer recalls, while his performance of recollected narrative honors historical court figures, in Machaut's case Jean l'Aveugle of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia.[29] The G Prologue cancels out the dual time scheme by consciously transferring Alceste from the lyric genre to narrative. In F, Cupid chides the poet for neglecting to 'sette' (F 540) Alceste in his Balade (an oversight remedied in G). In G, Alceste has her place in the grand narrative of womanly virtue that counters Criseyde's betrayal:

> Thanne seyde Love, 'A ful gret neglygence
> Was it to the, to write unstedefastnesse
> Of women, sith thow knowest here goodnesse
> By pref, and ek by storyes herebyforn.
> Let be the chaf, and writ wel of the corn.
> Why noldest thow han writen of Alceste,
> And laten Criseide ben aslepe and reste?' (G 525–31)

Alceste remembered is to be the focus of writing, while Criseyde presumably slips into oblivion – the place of no further poetic invention that Cupid enjoins the narrator to avoid ('It nedeth nat al day thus for to endite').

If Alceste resolves the crisis that Criseyde provokes by disclosing feminine betrayal as a destabilizing source of erotic and political disaffection, her translation from lyric to narrative nonetheless leaves a retrospect with more apparent than real resolution. The passage nicely echoes the Prologue's opening theme of 'preve' (F 9 and G 9) and 'olde aproved storyes' (F 21 and G 21), and it picks up Cupid's earlier image of 'draf' and 'corn' (G 312). But the 'unstedefastnesse / Of women' is a topic that eludes containment. It refers obliquely to the 'stedefaste widewes' (G 283) of Cupid's pagan and Christian literary tradition and contrastingly to Criseyde's being 'Tendre-herted, slydynge of corage' (*Troilus* 5.825), yet it resonates directly with the refrain in Chaucer's Boethian Balade 'Lak of Stedfastnesse', whose envoy to Richard combines the erotic and the political in an image of restored fidelity: 'wed thy folk agein to stedfastnesse' (line 28).[30] Finally, Cupid's general

[29] Guillaume de Machaut, *Le jugement du roy de Behaigne and Remede de fortune*, ed. J.I. Wimsatt and W.W. Kibler (Athens, GA, 1988), pp. 30 and 483, lists one verbal echo of *Behaigne*, but the Prologue depends on the structural device of the narrator's hiding himself and spying on his principal characters. Machaut's praise of his patron, as Wimsatt and Kibler note (p. 487), occupies *Behaigne* 1292–1343.

[30] Though most editors print the rubric to the envoy ('Lenvoy to King Richard') from Trinity College, Cambridge R 3.20, a Shirley manuscript, the address 'O prince' (line 22) and the exhortation 'Cherish thy folk' (line 23) make the context apparent. Fifteenth-century manuscripts designate Richard as the recipient in their titles to the

instruction – 'of Alceste shulde thy wrytynge be' (G 532) – is precisely what the poet does not follow. There is no concluding legend of Alceste, though one might be inferred in a putative plan of the *Legend*, and the heroines of the tales are closer to the mythological women caught in predicaments in Ovid's *Heroides* than figures whose fidelity to husbands and lovers provides a means for ransoming their men from death and disaster. Alceste operates in the G Prologue as a figure for memory and interpretation, not as a topic for continuing narrative invention. David Wallace, in his reading of the poem, suggests that, with Anne's death, the Prologue loses much of its purchase on history and retreats to a level of idealization and abstraction, which abets tyranny under the guise of benign humanism: 'the revisionary gestures of the G *Prologue* turn from a Dantean acceptance of temporality to a Petrarchan longing for transcendence'.[31] Such a withdrawal is the analogue at the political level to Seymour's blunted sensibility at the aesthetic level.

From the retrospect of Alceste's memorial presence, the portions retained from the F Prologue as well as the changes introduced in G form a new structure of meaning. Wallace emphasizes 'the ways in which a text, over time, comes to mean different things as circumstances change; the ways in which contemporary history may break into and embed itself in a literary construct or, as in the case of G, demand both expansion and excision.'[32] Within the dreamwork of the Prologue, Alceste remains a symbol of fidelity. Revisions to the opening of the Prologue prepare, however, for the exemplary rather than active role she plays. The epistemological conceit of the original version is that experience ('assay' and 'preve') must be supplemented by books and 'olde appreved stories' in those domains where we lack direct experience as a basis for knowledge. Chaucer's revisions highlight the importance of belief as a form of knowledge and social reality. In F, we must give credence to writing and doctrine '[t]hat tellen of these old appreved stories' (21), while in G we must give credence '[a]nd trowen on these olde aproved storyes' (21). Books deserve to be honored and believed in F, but in G belief is the sole obligation: '[w]el oughte us thanne on olde bokes leve' (27). Their claim is a supplement in F, holding in those areas 'there we han noon othyr preve' (28). In G, they are closer to the sole criterion of proof: 'There as there is non other assay by preve' (G 28).[33] The narrator in F gives books 'feyth and ful cre-

poem; see *The Minor Poems*, ed. G.B. Pace and A. David, vol. V, pt 1 of *A Variorum Edition of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Norman, OK, 1982), p. 85. V.J. Scattergood, 'The Short Poems', in Minnis, p. 491, suggests 1387 as a date for the composition of 'Lak of Stedfastnesse'.

31 D. Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, pp. 337–78, at pp. 338–9.

32 *Chaucerian Polity*, p. 370.

33 *MED* s.v. 'theras' definition 3c: 'inasmuch as, since.' I quote the text from Cowen and Kane, p. 326, to emphasize the difference between F (we should believe in books where

dence' (31) and holds them in reverence; in G, his commitment to them becomes passionate as well as volitional: in his heart he has 'hem in reverence, / And to hem yeve swich lust and swich credence' (31–32).

Faith and credence move from abstract problems of knowledge to concrete issues of allegiance in Cupid's indictment of the narrator and in Alceste's remarks on the obligations of rulers. In G, Chaucer signals a new formulation of erotic allegiance by modifying the *diminutio* early in the poem that depicts his narrative persona as a comic figure who gathers up what others have left behind in the imaginary field of poetic composition. He completely omits the address to 'Ye lovers that kan make of sentement' (F 69–72), with its echoes of 'ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse' from the *Troilus* (1. 22), and makes corresponding changes in his self-portrait as a humble maker:

> . . . I come after, glenynge here and there,
> And am ful glad if I may fynde an ere
> Of any goodly word that they [F: ye] han left.
> And if it happe me rehersen eft
> That they [F: ye] han in here freshe songes said,
> I hope they they wole nat ben evele apayd. . . . (G 63–8)

These revisions level the original hierarchy and network of cultural production connecting individual writers, a community of lovers and Cupid. The effects are fully apparent in the scene of indictment, where loyalty to love has been privatized to Cupid, without intermediaries or intervening authorities. In G, Cupid asks, 'Who restith there' (F: kneleth), to emphasize the sense of hiding, surveillance and stealth (G 238). The narrator offends him not by approaching 'So nygh myn oune floure, so boldely' (F 316) but by coming 'In my presence, and that so boldely' (G 242). It would be better, Cupid continues, for a worm to come 'in my syght' (F: to neghen ner my flour) than for the narrator to approach (G 244). The daisy, Cupid says in F, is 'my relyke, digne and delytable, / And thow my foo, and al my folk werreyest' (F 321–22). In G, the affront is registered personally: 'Thow art my mortal fo and me werreyest' (G 248). The narrator is said to hold it folly 'To serve Love' in F (327), but in G the issue is not the elaborate ceremonials of eroticized courtly performance but belief and fidelity: '[thow] holdest it folye / To truste on me' (G 252–53).

The change from serving love to 'truste on me' may anticipate the narrator's own notoriously ambivalent claim at the end of the 'Legend of Phyllis': 'trusteth, as in love, no man but me' (2559–61). And Cupid's abuse of the narrator for being a dotard 'As olde foles whan here spiryt fayleth' (G 262) may recall the poet's ironic self-portrait in the envoys to Scogan and Bukton,

we have no other proof) and G (we should believe in books since there is no other test by proof).

where erotic loyalty is evidently a matter of play in a circle of readers now diminished by time and political attrition in the late 1380s and 1390s. But the most important change in the passage is the shift in focus from the daisy as symbol of erotic fidelity to the demands of the royal will. Cupid's servants are not the community of lovers and poetic amateurs who compose out of *sentement*, presumably in the fixed forms of stylized courtly lyric.[34] They represent the substitutes and placeholders that L.O. Aranye Fradenburg describes as 'an intimate or proximate other, a distanced but still recognizable (self-)image, an imaginary support for the perfect ethical subject'.[35] In the revisionary context of the 1390s, they are an affinity whose purpose is to represent Cupid's royal authority. To undermine their loyalty is thus to subvert allegiance to the power they signify. As Chaucer amends Cupid's charge from 'al my folk werreyest' to 'me werreyest', he discloses the imperatives of personal and private loyalty shaping the social and political domains. In the logic of this appropriation, the objectified aim of serving Love transforms to a narrow attachment: 'truste on me'. In the dreamwork of the Prologue, the attachment extends in both directions but to a single purpose: those who trust in Cupid are those whom Cupid can trust.[36]

'Rex iratus'

Commentators have long noted the resemblance between Cupid in the Prologue and Richard II as represented in the historical record of the later fourteenth century. Helen Phillips, citing May McKisack, suggests a parallel between the narrator's abjection and Richard II's requirements for courtiers' submission in his presence.[37] Patricia J. Eberle observes that Richard's contemporaries 'attacked Richard's style as ruler for what they saw as arbitrary willfulness, the style of a tyrant who wanted to make his personal will have the force of law'.[38] For a poet like Gower, as J.D. Burnley points out, the emergence of Richard as an angry, cruel tyrant prompts revisions in the

34 For background, see R.F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1980); and J.I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto, 1993).

35 L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis, 2002), p. 177.

36 C. Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England 1360–1413* (New Haven, 1986), p. 217, explains the overriding reason for the growth of the king's affinity: 'he wanted to be sure of a loyal core of followers in a crisis'.

37 *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 321 n. to 237; M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1959), p. 490.

38 P.J. Eberle, 'The Politics of Courtly Style at the Court of Richard II', in *The Spirit of the Court*, ed. G.S. Burgess and R.A. Taylor (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 168–78, at p. 168.

1390s to his *Confessio Amantis*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Cronica Tripertita*.[39] The narrator of *Richard the Redeless* finds a monitory example in Richard's behavior: 'to teche men therafter / To be war of wylffulnesse, lest wondris arise' (Prologue 51–52).[40]

The narrator's traumatic encounter with Cupid in the *Legend* has its counterparts in political symbolism and performance throughout Richard's public life. Perhaps the one closest at hand for the F Prologue is the incident at a council in Westminster in 1385 when Richard, hearing complaints against his favorites, furiously threatened William Courtney, the archbishop of Canterbury: 'quibus auditis rex iratus versus archiepiscopum illico surrexit et minas ei intulit' ('on hearing them the king, enraged with the archbishop, leapt to his feet with a volley of threats at him').[41] In the version recorded in the *Vita Ricardi Secundi*, Richard is 'grauiter iratus', ready to strike the archbishop and indignant enough to pile abuse on him.[42] Thomas Walsingham's language is equally vivid: Richard is inflamed with passion against Courtney ('exarsit iracundiam'). Walsingham goes on to report that Michael de la Pole scarcely evades Richard's rage ('indignationem regiam') when he does not carry out Richard's order to confiscate Courtney's temporal goods. The king's verbal abuse of these two, says Walsingham, is too great and indecorous to transcribe, as are the accusations against Thomas Trivet and John Deveroux, who speak in behalf of the archbishop.[43]

The pattern of the 'rex iratus' emerges early and persists to the end – and beyond, in the public imagination of chroniclers writing after events and of propagandists making political capital out of them. Adam Usk reports that Wat Tyler's head is struck off at Smithfield in the 1381 Rising because he does not doff his cap to the king or show respect for his majesty: 'regi quia capicium non deponentis nec ipsius regis magestatem in aliquo reuerentis'.[44] The Westminster Chronicler records Richard's confrontation in the 1383 par-

39 J.D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 11–20.

40 *Richard the Redeless and Mum and Sothsegger*, ed. J.M. Dean (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000), p. 24.

41 *Westminster Chronicle*, ed. and trans. L.C. Hector and B.F. Harvey (Oxford, 1982), pp. 116–17.

42 *Historia Vitae et Regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed. G.B. Stow, Jr. (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 86.

43 Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H.T. Riley, 2 vols, Rolls Series (London, 1864), II, p. 128: 'Praetermitto, quia longum foret scribere, verba contumeliosa quae Rex jecit in utrumque, quae regale fastigium non decerent. Taceo probra et opprobria, quae dixit in Dominum Thomam Trivet, quamvis, ut quidam asserunt, verum dixerit, vocando eum publicum proditorem; taceo verba procacia et contumeliosa habita per eum contra Dominum Johannem Deveroux, militem generosum, qui verba pro Archiepiscopo facere sunt conati'.

44 *The Chronicle of Adam Usk 1377–1421*, p. 4. *The Anonimalle Chronicle 1333 to 1381*, ed. V.H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927), pp. 148–9, describes a more elaborate pattern of misrule, insult and menace.

liament with the lords temporal who complain of his governance: 'primo dominorum insolenciam aliqualiter rigide reprehendit' ('he began by rebuking the effrontery of the lords with a certain sternness').[45] It is worth noting that here the chronicler describes Richard's behavior approvingly ('sagaciter et prudenter') and regards it as a calculated gesture to draw the lower classes who were alienated from him. In other words, princely anger by itself is not necessarily a political vice; in the public as in the private sphere, it operates in relation to other elements in an economy of demands, desires and symbolic gestures.

The issue in these confrontations is the alignment of royal will, sovereignty and governance. A particularly clear example of this alignment is Richard's reaction in the 1384 Salisbury parliament when the earl of Arundel chides him for bad governance: 'Ad hec verba excanduit rex et totus versus in furorem ac torvo vultu comitem predictum respiciens dixit ei: "Quod si tu michi imponas, et mei culpa sit ut malum regimen habeatur in regno, in faciem tuam mentiris. Vadas ad diabolum!" ' ('White with the passion which, at these words, pervaded his whole being, the king scowled at the earl. "If it is to my charge", he said, "that you would lay this, and it is supposed to be my fault that there is misgovernment in the kingdom, you lie in your teeth. You can go to the Devil!" ').[46] The angry king is a figure, then, not just of private or poetic imagination but of public knowledge and institutional anxiety in matters of governance.

The dreamwork of Chaucer's Prologue registers the intensification of personal features in royal representation. The distinction between the king's two bodies – his public and personal identities – collapses in the erasure of the daisy and its replacement by 'my presence' and 'my syght' and in the relocation of the narrator's supposed warfare against Cupid's folk to Cupid himself. This turn toward wilfullness is a prominent, though complex, feature of contemporary accounts of Richard's confrontations with the magnates. On the one hand, royal will is a fundamental element of medieval political institutions, necessary for effective government. John of Gaunt's general alignment with Richard, despite conflicts and differing aims, shows the investment of magnates and oligarchs with the monarch. The specific formulation given to political relations here and elsewhere is personal loyalty. Gervase Mathew describes loyalty as 'a quality that could only be exercised or violated in a personal relationship between two individuals. I can find no medieval example of the conception of loyalty to an idea or to a cause. The fact must have been there often enough, but it would not be phrased or thought of as loyalty.'[47] On the other hand, royal will without the countervailing force of aristocratic counsel and common consent is tyranny.

45 *The Westminster Chronicle 1381–1394*, pp. 54–5.
46 *The Westminster Chronicle 1381–1394*, pp. 68–9.
47 G. Mathew, *The Court of Richard II* (New York, 1968), p. 138.

The debate over tyranny takes several rhetorical and performative forms in the 1380s and 1390s. Ritual and ceremony act out power relations, as in the courtiers' genuflection before the enthroned king that Phillips and McKisack cite from the *Eulogium Historiarum Sive Temporis*.[48] Within and beyond the court, Nigel Saul notes, 'it was through language that subjects expressed their perception of their relationship with the ruler'.[49] In the early 1390s, elaborate forms of royal address appear which reflect a changed idea of kingship from one based on lordship, in which the ruler is addressed as a great magnate, to one based on majesty, which emphasized a theocratic dimension to kingship. The latter served as a means to enforce obedience to the royal will and to distance the monarch from his subjects. In the Prologue to the *Legend*, Chaucer examines another rhetorical form. Cupid's indictment of the narrator centers, as we have seen, on who enjoys the personal relationship and affective bonds that define loyalty and authority.

Henry Knighton's chronicle captures these tensions in the period in which Chaucer writes the *Legend* while serving in Parliament as Knight of the Shire of Kent. In 1386, Thomas Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, and Thomas Arundel, bishop of Ely, representing parliament, advise Richard that single-minded willfulness is just cause for deposition: 'capitose in suis insanis consiliis propriam uoluntatem suam singularem proterue exercere' ('[if he] wrong-headedly, upon his own unsound conclusions, follows the promptings of his untempered will').[50] The rhetorical concentration on private agency in the phrase 'propriam uoluntatem suam singularem' marks the shift from licit royal will to a personalization of regality. A year later, the judges of the realm summoned to council at Nottingham were made to ratify the king's singular will. They held unanimously that the ordinance and commission established in the Wonderful Parliament of 1386 to limit royal power were derogatory to the prerogative of the king 'particularly because they were against the will etc' ('contra uoluntatem [*add.* regis] etcetera').[51] In Richard's last parliament, in 1397, the opening address by Edmund Stafford, bishop of Exeter, followed the single theme that the king's power belonged uniquely and undividedly to him ('semper concludebat ad unum, quod potestas regis esset sibi unica et solida'). Parliament decreed that anyone acting

48 *Eulogium Historiarum Sive Temporis*, ed. F.S. Haydon, 3 vols, Rolls Series (London, 1858–63), III, p. 378.

49 N. Saul, 'Richard II and the Vocabulary of Kingship', *English Historical Review* 110 (1995), 854–77 (p. 855).

50 *Knighton's Chronicle 1337–96*, ed. and trans. G.H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), pp. 360–1.

51 *Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 396–7; cf. *Westminster Chronicle*, pp. 198–9: 'contra voluntatem Regis.'

against the king's regality was to be judged a traitor ('falsus proditor') and punished accordingly.[52]

One of the charges made in the articles of deposition against Richard in 1399 is that he failed to preserve the laws and customs of the kingdom and acted instead according to what happened to please his own will ('sue arbitrium Voluntatis facere quicquid desideriis ejus occurrerit'). Margaret Schlauch observes, 'the phrase about Richard's *voluntatis arbitrium*, as opposed to the laws, runs like a theme through many of the articles of deposition'.[53] Nigel Saul indicates that the final decade of Richard's reign marks a decisive ideological turn: 'In the early 1390s Richard's style of government became increasingly assertive. A novel emphasis was placed on the powers of the prerogative and on the subject's obligation to obey.'[54] Saul develops the point: 'To a greater degree than his predecessors, Richard had allowed the exercise of power to become fused in his mind with his own sense of being. He saw attacks on his kingship as attacks on his own personality. He could not separate the questioning of policy from criticism of him personally.'[55]

The threat of treason here and elsewhere in the 1380s and 1390s, amplified by personalized authority, confines poetic discourse to the conventional forms of general exhortation and flattering admonition, even as political discourse grows confrontational and violent. Alceste, in her defense of the poet, can warn that a 'ryghtwis lord' is not like the 'tirauntz of Lumbardye' (F 373–74 and G 353–54). In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer will portray two such tyrants, though on a decidedly smaller scale, in the male protagonists of the 'Clerk's Tale' and 'Merchant's Tale'. Schlauch points out that Chaucer draws on a heritage of theoretical discussions about tyranny and kingship that find a point of consolidation in the twelfth century, adjust to the refinements of legal practice and Aristotelian theory in the thirteenth century and absorb the experience of developments in England and Italy in Chaucer's own age. The two informing principles of legitimate kingship are the rule of law and concern for the common good. A tyrant, Schlauch argues on the basis of Bracton and other legal codifiers, is defined as a ruler guided by his will to the exclusion of other interests. In moral and political terms, he is driven by his own gratification rather than the well-being of his subordinates.[56] In the G Prologue, Chaucer accents this formulation by adding the phrase 'wilfulhed and tyrannye' (G 355) in Alceste's description of Lombard tyrants.

Tyranny can be simultaneously named and disavowed in exemplary dis-

52 *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, pp. 20–3.

53 Item 33 in *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, 3: 419, quoted in M. Schlauch, 'Chaucer's Doctrine of Kings and Tyrants', *Speculum* 20 (1945), 133–56 (p. 155).

54 N. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, 1997), p. 438.

55 Saul, p. 466.

56 Schlauch, p. 136.

course, which constantly renews itself as circumstances change; the generic modes include not just mirrors for princes but moralized history, such as Lydgate would compose for Henry V, and moral ballads, such as Chaucer's 'Gentilesse', which Henry Scogan incorporates into his 'moral Balade' written for the sons of Henry IV.[57] Tyranny operates in Ricardian dreamwork by displacing the gratifications of privatized monarchy onto the forms of allegiance demanded by a despot. The sovereign's overbearing power as such is no longer under direct scrutiny. Rather, debate relocates the question to the kinds of allegiance that are the tangible signs of royal power. To attack or undermine such allegiance is to challenge regality. Chaucer replicates this displacement in the revisions we have seen in Cupid's indictment in the G Prologue. Prominent among those changes is his recrafting part of the passage to read, 'My servaunts ben alle wyse and honourable' (G 247). Love's adepts are substitutes and placeholders for obedience to Cupid's will; they perform the God of Love's desires. Thus, Cupid reasons, hindering love's folk and obstructing their devotion signify a refusal 'To truste on me' (G 253). Hindering, in this context, means both to harm and to defame so that poetic resistance amounts to political betrayal of the royal will.[58]

Chaucer's formulation of erotic loyalty shares the same discourse of allegiance over which the magnates, the king and his favorites struggled throughout Richard's reign. In one sense, the strategy of blaming the king's counselors for the monarch's deficiencies is a venerable form of diplomatic cover, for it allows one to lodge complaint while displacing responsibility and obscuring the root cause. Richard's fury at Archbishop Courtney's complaint against his favorites is a splendid case of taking the public fiction literally and stumbling over the secret of the form, the erotic investment hidden by a commonplace. In the Prologue, this investment acquires a particular resonance because the charge laid against royal favorites like Robert de Vere and Michael de la Pole is that they have hindered and obstructed the love that should bind the king to his great lords. In the language of Cupid's indictment of the *Legend*'s poet-narrator, Richard's favorites have performed the 'translacioun' that alienates the monarch and his most devoted folk. According to Knighton's account, Gloucester, Arundel and Thomas Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, the core of the Appellants, find themselves blocked by Richard's new men. The favorites have distanced and removed the king from the magnates, and launched him into a frenetic circulation that literally enacts mutability, instability and infidelity: 'qui regem subduxerant et alienare se fecerant a consilio dictorum dominorum in magnum grauamen regis et regni, unde circuire fecerunt partes regni per gyrum ne prope esset

57 I owe the point about the need to renew and adjust exemplary discourse to Matthew Boyd Goldie; see in general J. Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 1996).

58 *MED*, s.v. 'hindren', 1 and 2a.

consilio dominorum, ne forte eorum consilium caperet effectum. Reuera non est auditum quod aliquis rex girauerit fines regni in tam breui tempore sicuti ille fecit illis diebus per eorum nephandum consilium' ('[they] had withdrawn the king and estranged him from the counsel of the said lords, to the great damage of the king and the kingdom, and had caused him to go whirling about the kingdom so that he should not be near the said lords, lest their counsel should take effect, and in truth no king had ever been known to travel the bounds of the kingdom in so short a time as had he, under the influence of their wicked counsel').[59] In Knighton's formulation, the great men of the kingdom are the steadfast consorts of a monarch led into variability, and they suffer as abandoned intimates and the victims of 'divisioun'.

The first article in the charges made against Richard's favorites in the Merciless Parliament of 1388 is about love, attachment and allegiance. Knighton reports it from the parliament rolls as follows: 'qe entierement en luy fyrent de tut a euax donez sone amour et ferme foy et credens, et hayez sez loiax seignurs et lieges, par queux il duist de droit pluis auer et este gouerne' ('that they might persuade him entirely to commit his affection and true faith and belief to them, and to hate his loyal lords and lieges by whom he should rather and by right have been led').[60] This estrangement of affection is then reiterated in ways that demonstrate the links between erotic and political discourse. The favorites divide the hearts of the king and his lords 'in encompassing the estrangement of the king's heart from the peers of the realm to have between themselves alone the governance of the kingdom' ('en compassance de eloignez le coer nostre seignur le roy dez pieres de la terre, pur auoire entre eux seul le gouernement du roialme'). The contest is between licit and forbidden attachments, chaste desires sanctioned by custom and libidinous demands made for advantage. To distance the king's heart is nothing less than to alienate him from loyal folk who should share and return his trust. On this view, removal and isolation – literal 'hindering' of the king's rightful folk – are treasonable tactics that displace legitimate attachments and move the erotic center to the margins and periphery ('souent fyrent le roy soy esloigner en lez pluis loingtines partiez du roialme').[61]

A 'calandier of goodnesse'

The Prologue to the *Legend* offers an apparent but finally inaccessible remedy to tyranny's single-minded demand of loyalty and erotic investment. That remedy lies in the royal intervention staged by Alceste, who is herself

[59] *Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 402–5; my adjustment of punctuation.
[60] *Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 458–9.
[61] *Knighton's Chronicle*, pp. 461 and 479.

the condensation of undoubted allegiance and overdetermined erotic attachment – the mythological wife of another man who has already died in place of her husband yet reappears as Cupid's queen. Wallace describes Alceste, like Dame Prudence in the *Melibee* and other women in Chaucer's writing, as an eloquent wife who stands between an irate man and the larger public sphere. In the F Prologue at least, she represents an alternative to the destructive masculine forces of tyranny and related forms of political absolutism. Paul Strohm proposes that for late medieval queens intercession is a compensatory form of power from the margins rather than the full partnership at the center of royal authority that they enjoyed in the high Middle Ages.[62] One might object that few Plantagenet queens enjoyed partnership or even particularly cordial relations with their husbands. Fradenburg, seeing queens as a 'proximate' other, contends that such 'figures of petition and intercession are perilously unstable'.[63] Their derivative position absorbs but never resolves the conflicts between abjection and assertion: queens display their dependence rhetorically and performatively while advancing petitions and offering counsel to rulers. But Strohm and Fradenburg rightly contend that intercession is a powerful political and cultural practice that exercises substantial power though it may not be clearly or adequately represented in the historical record. It is, above all, to the benefit of tyrannical rulers that queens act as intercessors. Intercessors secure the chance for monarchs to revise rash pronouncements, while saving the face of royal authority, and to temper justice with mercy. They provide an escape from the potential ironies and blunders of royal will when it preempts the deliberations of law.

In the F Prologue to the *Legend*, Alceste operates in the same sphere of informal power, cultural practice and political desires as the historical Queen Anne. Strohm observes that the role of intercessor and advocate already awaited Anne when she arrived in England and that she exercised it prominently and dramatically over the next decade until her death. Saul indicates that her role in politics was largely confined to intercession.[64] Anne also failed in this role in one case that may represent another source of trauma and anxiety in Chaucer's poem: Simon Burley, tutor to Richard II and a likely member of Chaucer's poetic audience, was executed despite the queen's pleas to the Lords Appellant. (Richard squared accounts in 1397, acceding to his child-queen Isabelle's intercession to save the earl of Warwick but answering the earl of Arundel's bid to save his life, 'You shall have such mercy as you showed to Simon Burley . . . when the queen went down on her knees before you on his behalf.' Arundel was beheaded on the spot where

62 P. Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 95–119.

63 Fradenburg, p. 183.

64 Saul, *Richard II*, p. 455.

Burley was executed.[65]) In the G Prologue, as Wallace maintains, Alceste's role as intercessor and counselor changes significantly. The historical personage whom Alceste honors is present only as a memory, not as a figure of courtly address. The monarch for whom Cupid stands in occupies a different political and ideological position, shaped by a decade of political struggle. As Anne loses her historical presence, Richard deepens his in a series of disputes over royal authority and loyalty. Yet as Phillips points out, Alceste actually has an increased prominence in G over F, and her historical erasure may have allowed Chaucer more freedom to portray her as a polyvalent symbol.[66] His portrayal of Alceste thus operates as revision within the dreamwork, connecting elements of the earlier narrative to produce a different formulation and a different understanding of the earlier text.

One significant feature of Chaucer's revision is the heightened legalism that Alceste invokes as she intercedes with Cupid. The narrator, Alceste says, has the right to answer not just the substance of Cupid's charges (F 344: 'al this that ye have to him meved') but 'these poynts that ye han to hym meved' (G 320). As Burnley notes, Alceste here uses 'some of the technical language of legal procedure'.[67] She conspicuously draws Cupid onto procedural grounds, reversing the supplantation of law and custom by royal prerogative. At the same time, Alceste announces a reformulated ideology of kingship. In F, she argued that a god like Cupid should be 'stable / And therto gracious and merciable' (346–7). In G, the margin of discretion – and potential abuse – implied by 'gracious' is replaced by a different norm: 'he shal be stable, / And therto ryghtful, and ek mercyable' (G 322–3). In other words, a rightful lord is one constrained by custom and law rather than driven by the gratifications of will and prerogative. Alceste also displaces the act of indictment from Cupid to the proverbial 'losengeour' and slanderers of court life who fabricate charges (G 327: 'many a tale yfeyned') out of malice. Their intent is to supplant the licit erotics of Love's folk and 'for to han with you som dalyaunce' (G 332). As Simpson observes, their falsifications implicitly follow directions that Cupid has made known and legitimate.[68] The ambiguity of their 'dalyaunce' with Cupid, which Chaucer accentuates in G, takes on additional meaning in light of the supposed homoerotic bonds between the king and his favorites. Walsingham brought these claims into public discourse. He embellishes his earlier complaint about the preferment and honors that Richard bestowed on Robert de Vere by inserting a passage that shaped subsequent accounts of their relationship: 'tantum afficiebatur eidem, tantum coluit et amavit eundem, non sine nota, prout fertur, familiaritatis obscoenae'

65 *Chronicles of the Revolution*, pp. 65 and 96.
66 Phillips, 'Register, Politics, and the *Legend of Good Women*', p. 121.
67 Burnley, p. 32.
68 Simpson, p. 97.

('he had such affection for him, he cherished and loved him so much, not excluding, as it was said, with indecent intimacy').[69]

A parallel feature of the revised dreamwork in G involves Lombard tyrants '[t]hat usen wilfulhed and tyrannye' (G 355). Wallace points out that this is precisely the sort of political arrangement that Richard avoided in the late 1370s in the failed marriage negotiations with Caterina Visconti, to which Chaucer may have been party in his second Italian journey and to which Anne offered not just a historical but a fully theorized ideological alternative.[70] In F, the alternative to tyranny is implicit, and Cupid takes it up ostentatiously in confirming Alceste's intervention: 'Al lyeth in yow, dooth wyth hym what yow leste. / I al foryeve' (F 449–50). In G, this gesture is shown in retrospect, as forgiveness is resituated in the queen: 'Al lyth in yow, doth with hym what yow leste; / And al foryeve' (G 439–40). In the meantime, Alceste elaborates the responsibilities that accompany a king's prerogative and constrain it from tyranny:

> . . . hym oweth, of verray duetee,
> Shewen his peple pleyn benygnete,
> And wel to heren here excusacyouns,
> And here compleyntes and petyciouns,
> In duewe tyme, whan they shal it profre. (G360–6)

Benygnete implies nothing less than fair and speedy justice under the rule of law. To this, Alceste adds a further injunction that figures prominently in the public discourse of Richard's royal authority – the need for a king to keep his oaths and sworn covenants. The monarch is bound to his liegeman by the historical weight of his pledge rather than his will: 'therto is a kyng ful depe ysworn / Ful many an hundred wynter herebeforn' (G 368–9).

In the lexicon of kingship, then, Alceste seems to call Cupid back from abusive majesty to traditional lordship: 'He moste thinke yt is his lige man' (F 379 and G 359). A just king, she says, is bound to 'kepe his lordes hire degree' (F 384 and G 370) through a politics of erotic investment: 'it ys ryght and skilful that they bee / Enhaunced and honoured, and most dere – / For they ben half-goddes in this world here' (F 385–7 and G 371–3). Like the mercy Alceste secures for the narrator, the political erotics of kingship is, however, an ideological fantasy now put out of reach and indefinitely deferred. As he reworks the scenes of indictment and intercession by having Alceste expound the rule of law and the advantage of lordship over tyranny, Chaucer sets out the remedy not taken in the world that reads his poem. His revised poem may succeed in winning Cupid's love, the aim that stands

[69] Walsingham, II, p. 148; Stow, 'Richard II in Thomas Walsingham's Chronicles', pp. 86–7.

[70] *Chaucerian Polity*, pp. 367–8.

revealed as the monarch's last word as he charges the poet to begin with Cleopatra and end with Alceste 'and my love so shalt thow wynne' (G 543). At the same time, it reveals another understanding that history has brought to the Ricardian dreamwork: loss and mourning are the reverse side of political erotics.

'Goode wommen alle, and trewe of love'

The revised Prologue discloses its secret in Alceste's memorial presence and the menacing focus of Cupid's erotic demands. We might ask, in closing, how this dreamwork affects any potential re-reading and understanding of the legends. Chaucer revises the Prologue but leaves the legends following it substantially unchanged. The dreamwork of the Prologue is thus a historical lens for understanding the same stories in a different interpretive context. Read through the Ricardian dreamwork, the legends become narratives of ambivalence and heightened contradiction both in their exemplary meaning and in the literary work that they hold out prospectively for the poet. If the program of writing female virtue acquires an ideological coherence supported by pagan and Christian authors alike, it also becomes a dead letter. To impugn the goodness of women, as Cupid formulates the issue, means to stand outside 'al the world of auctours' (G 308). To imagine that topic as a vital poetic source is impossible: 'It nedeth nat al day thus for to endite' (G 310). Moreover, as Simpson aptly notes, much of the content for the legends is drawn from women writing on the point of death, and the commission given Chaucer is itself a death sentence designed to occupy all his literary energies 'whil that thou livest, yer by yere' (G 471).[71]

The standard of female virtue, to be given final expression in Alceste's story, may displace erotic loyalty from Love's folk, who can be hindered and obstructed in their trust for Cupid, to exemplary women who maintain their *trouthe*. At the same time, the erotic investment in female virtue largely relocates the same anxieties and contradictions. The Cleopatra story, the opening legend that Cupid prescribes, embodies the ideological reform of literary tradition by presenting an oriental queen as a faithful wife, but it does so against the background of Antony's betrayal of his political marriage and his prince. Other characters in the *Legend* suggest that virtuous women can serve as figures of violent agency as well as loyalty and allegiance. The suppressed portions of the Hypsipyle, Medea and Hypermnestra stories attempt to remove a background of violence directed against husbands. The Ariadne and Philomela stories foreground male deceit and violence, yet one subtext of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus is the earlier betrayal of Athens by

[71] Simpson, pp. 87, 95–6.

Nisus's daughter, and the cost of vengeance for Philomela and Procne is the murder of Philomela's son and the end of Tereus's dynastic ambitions. Good women, like Love's folk, bring some measure of irreducible alterity to their stories of erotic attachment, and the dreamwork of the Prologue makes their difference visible. For the F Prologue, their stories mark points where narratives of love and loyalty resist an imposed program of courtly writing. In G, they reveal how good women, like the steadfast aristocratic consorts unwillingly separated from their king, may be dangerous political subjects.

4

'Olde Stories' and Amazons: The *Legend of Good Women*, the 'Knight's Tale', and Fourteenth-Century Political Culture

NANCY BRADLEY WARREN

Listening to Old Stories

The Prologues to the *Legend of Good Women* are, famously, concerned with *auctoritas* and the textual tradition of 'olde appreved stories' (F 21).[1] In *Troilus and Criseyde*, one of the texts for which the *Legend* purports to do literary penance, lack of attention to old stories is a crucial mistake. In Book V, Cassandra urgently tries to make Troilus aware of the story of Thebes when she responds to his request for help interpreting his dream.[2] Cassandra tells him that if he wants to know the dream's meaning, he must 'a fewe of olde stories heere' (V 1459). She goes on to recount in some detail the destruction of Thebes, material that for Troilus has both personal and political importance. His fortunes in love and the fortunes of the city of Troy mirror each other, and in both cases he ignores warnings provided by examples from the past.[3]

As Troilus's example instructs us, old stories reveal things that audiences may not initially be able to recognize or may not *want* to recognize. Trolius's example also instructs us, however, that if old stories are not heard, damaging consequences may follow. In this essay, then, I propose to heed Cassandra's plea to attend to stories of the past, especially those of Thebes and Troy, and I

1 All quotes from Chaucer's works are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. L.D. Benson (Boston, 1987). I will give parenthetical citations by line number (as well as by book or fragment number where relevant) in the text.

2 On Chaucer's use of Theban material in *Troilus and Criseyde* see D. Anderson, 'Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*,' SAC 4 (1982), 109–33; on the passage from Book V discussed below, see especially pp. 121–3.

3 Anderson observes, 'It has often been pointed out that Chaucer built a thoroughgoing analogy between the microcosm of the personal affairs of Troilus, or 'little Troy,' and the macrocosm of Troy itself' (*ibid.*, p. 129; Anderson gives an extensive list of critics who discuss the Troy/Troilus parallels; see p. 129, n. 8).

will focus particularly on women's roles in these stories. Because the *Legend* is a text concerned with the creation of political as well as literary authority in its presentation of old stories about women, I will also explore the ways in which such stories, and the problematic ramifications of deafness to them, are, for Chaucer and his contemporary audience as for Troilus, political as well as personal.

These assertions concerning the importance of old stories about women in the *Legend of Good Women* might lead one to believe that this essay will consist of another tour through the familiar territory of what Chaucer omits from his accounts of good women. On the contrary, however, I am interested in what Chaucer leaves in and why. More precisely, I take as a starting point what is present but hidden, at times in plain sight, in Chaucer's accounts of the 'saints of Cupid' in order to interpret the clues to reading both old stories and the *Legend* itself offered by the *Legend*'s interactions with other Chaucerian texts. Indeed, since the conceptual premise of the *Legend* turns on an intertextual transaction involving Chaucer's treatment of women in old stories, it is particularly important to consider the *Legend*'s presentations of women, and the attendant political implications, in light of Chaucer's engagement with such stories elsewhere in his *corpus*.[4]

Significantly, the *Legend* has strong intertextual links not only to the *Troilus* but also to the 'Knight's Tale', which too is a meditation on political power and the power of love.[5] The reference to 'al the love of Palamon and

4 An intertextual approach to the *Legend of Good Women* also seems particularly appropriate since the *Legend* is modeled on, and draws a great deal from, Ovid's *Heroides*. As F. Percival points out, 'The *Heroides* were profoundly intertextual, and exploited the audience's knowledge of other literary versions of the stories. . . . Chaucer's desire to construct narratives to which a fragment of Heroidean complaint could be attached involved him in extensive compilation of material from different sources' (*Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* [Cambridge, 1998], p. 174).

5 As is well known, there are also strong intertextual relationships between the 'Knight's Tale' and the *Troilus*. Both texts, probably produced in the early 1380s, exhibit influences of the Boethian material that Chaucer was translating at the same time, both incorporate material from Statius, and both derive from Boccaccian sources (see the introductory note to *Troilus and Criseyde* in *The Riverside Chaucer* [pp. 1020–2] and that to the 'Knight's Tale' [*ibid.*, pp. 826–8]). L. Patterson provides an extensive survey of perspectives on dating the 'Knight's Tale' and the *Troilus* (see *Chaucer and the Subject of History* [Madison, 1991], p. 169 n. 10), concluding, 'The upshot of this evidence . . . is that it is likely that the *Troilus* and the "Knight's Tale" were being written at about the same time but that the "Knight's Tale" continued to be worked on after the *Troilus* was completed' (*ibid.*). That the lovesick and exiled Arcite adopts the name Philostrate in the 'Knight's Tale' suggests another connection with the *Troilus*. In Boccaccio's *Teseida*, Chaucer's source for the tale, Arcite 'assumes the name Penteo; Chaucer took the name Philostrate from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, the primary source of the *Troilus*' (explanatory note for 'Knight's Tale,' line 1428, *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 832). The Theseus story is presented in the 'Knight's Tale' and the *Legend* at nearly the same time.

Arcite' (F 420) in the F prologue of the *Legend* initially suggests a connection between the two texts. The 'Knight's Tale', which begins 'Whilom as olde stories tellen us' (I 859), represents a return by Chaucer to source material drawn from Statius and Boccaccio, writers who were his sources in the *Troilus* and to whom he also had recourse in the *Legends*. Furthermore, although there is considerable scholarly debate concerning the date for both the 'Knight's Tale' and the *Legend*, it is likely that Chaucer was at work on some version of both texts during the politically tumultuous later 1380s.[6]

David Wallace has pointed to yet another link that begins to suggest the ways in which the texts' overlap concerns women, conflict, and political culture. He notes that the reference in the 'Knight's Tale' to Theseus's use of the Minotaur banner calls up the memory of Ariadne, inviting us 'to read the Emelye, Palamon, and Arcite narratives against that of Theseus, Ariadne, and Phedra'. He further argues that this conflation of narratives is 'reinforced elsewhere within the Chaucerian corpus by the *Legend of Ariadne*'. The legend of Ariadne, he observes, stands in relation to the 'Knight's Tale' as the *Legend of Good Women* as a whole does to *Troilus and Criseyde*; that is to say, they 'dispute the viewpoint of official masculinist history' presented in the 'Knight's Tale' and the *Troilus*.[7]

The many links between the *Legend* and the tale highlight a rather surprising element shared by many of Cupid's saints and the female characters in the 'Knight's Tale'. Although there are no actual Amazons in the *Legend of Good Women*, many of the women play 'Amazon-like' roles in 'olde stories',

6 Percival comments on the fact that Chaucer composed versions of the *Legend of Good Women* and the 'Knight's Tale' 'fairly close in time', observing that their chronological closeness should encourage us to consider them together (*Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, p. 185).

7 D. Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, 1997), p. 114. M. Sherman too notes the presence of Ariadne 'under erasure' in the 'Knight's Tale' ('The Politics of Discourse in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" ', *Exemplaria* 6.1 [1994], 87–114, at pp. 108–9). The complicating force of the legend of Ariadne for the 'Knight's Tale' is strengthened by the fact that, as J.L. Lowes pointed out long ago, many of the events in Chaucer's version of the Ariadne story are not present in classical sources or in other medieval versions. They do, though, have parallels in the 'Knight's Tale', including the placement of Theseus's prison in a tower like the one he constructs for Palamon and Arcite in the 'Knight's Tale': Theseus's offer to serve Ariadne and Phaedra as a page, as Arcite does Theseus; and the use of disfigurement as disguise. Such similarities are present, Lowes believes, because Chaucer used Boccaccio's *Teseida* to flesh out the Ariadne story (see J.L. Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* considered in its Chronological Relations', *PMLA* 20 [1905], 749–864, at pp. 804–10). Percival discusses Lowes's observations in *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, and as she points out, 'if Chaucer was using the *Teseida* at this point to flesh out the story of Theseus and Ariadne, there is at least an explanation for his strange slip in writing that Minos' prison and his daughters' chamber faced "the maysterstrete / of Athens" (1965–66), the setting for the *Teseida* and the "Knight's Tale" ' (*Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, p. 186).

resembling the tale's Hippolyta and Emelye. Several, indeed most, of Love's martyrs are women who turn (or at least threaten to turn) the literary war between the sexes dramatized in the Prologues into literal war between the sexes. The often hidden, but indisputably present, 'Amazonian' histories of these women call into question not only official masculinist history but also masculine political dominance.

The first legend Chaucer recounts in his collection of Cupid's saints is that of Cleopatra, one of a cluster of good women who are not directly involved in the Theban/Trojan sagas but who do have in their old stories Amazonian elements, unlikely though the presence of such elements might initially seem. For instance, Cleopatra's engagement in the sea battle of Actium, on which Chaucer lavishes so much detail (633–55), might be seen as an aquatic version of Amazonian behavior. Semiramis, not herself one of the company of good women, is invoked prominently at the beginning of the legend of Thisbe, which immediately follows that of Cleopatra. The legend of Thisbe is one of the relatively few in which the heroine does not have a history including violent actions (except, of course, Thisbe's self-directed violence of suicide), but it opens with a reference to Semiramis's military fortification of her city that resonates with Cleopatra's participation in naval warfare: 'At Babiloyne whylom fil it thus, / The whyche toun the queen Semyramus / Let dychen al aboute and walles make' (706–8).

Although Philomela would seem, alongside Thisbe, one of the most passive of the heroines in the *Legend*, the famous scene that Chaucer omits – her and Procne's dismembering and cooking of Procne's son Itys for Tereus to consume – is a nearly inescapable absent presence. It appears in Chaucer's Ovidian source, and both Gower and Chretien de Troyes relate the full story.[8] Hypermnestra too, whose unfinished story closes the *Legend*, seems an improbable Amazonian figure, given her declared horror of knives (2594–95) and her sparing of her husband.[9] As is the case with the murder of Itys in the legend of Philomela, the Amazonian scene of all Hypermnestra's sisters' murdering all her husband's brothers hovers inescapably in the background. The glosses Boccaccio wrote for the *Teseida*, a text that Chaucer clearly knew well, highlight the Amazonian dimensions of this part of Hypermnestra's story. The glosses for this poem featuring the marriages of the Amazons Ipolita and Emilia incorporate several accounts of 'women who present a lethal threat to the men they marry, including a short summary of how the Amazons got their independence' – that is, by killing their husbands

8 *Riverside Chaucer*, note to *Legend of Good Women* lines 2382–93, p. 1073.

9 While Hypermnestra does not fit directly into the Theban or Trojan narratives, her story, complete with the reversals of the names of Danaus and Aegyptus included in Chaucer's version, is contained in Lactantius Placidus's *Commentarius in Statii Thebaida*, a text Chaucer may have known. See the headnote to the explanatory notes on the *Legend of Good Women* in the *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 1074.

– and 'the tale of fifty daughters of Danaus who kill their husbands on their wedding night'.[10]

With Dido, we come to an Amazonian good woman who is, as might be expected, strongly linked to the old story of the fall of Troy.[11] Her legend, the longest that Chaucer includes, in many ways resembles not only his earlier account of Cleopatra but also, and even more strikingly, his account of the Amazon princess Emelye in the 'Knight's Tale'. For instance, the description of Dido in her temple (1015–26) resonates with that of Emelye's worship of Diana (I 2271–2366). Similarly, when Dido goes hunting with 'speres brode and kene' (1190) the scene recalls both the legend's earlier account of Venus disguised as a 'Diana-esque' huntress walking in the woods carrying bow and arrows (970–82) and the Knight's representation of the hunting party of Emelye, Hippolyta, and Theseus engaged in the service of Diana.[12] When Venus reveals to Aeneas where he is, furthermore, her explanation sounds like a description of the land of the arrow-wielding Amazons. She says, 'For maydens walken in the contre here, / With arwes and with bowe, in this manere. / This is the reyne of Libie there ye ben, / Of which that Dido lady is and queen' (990–3). Libya was, in fact, one of the regions from which a tribe of Amazons was said to come. Given these connections, it is not terribly sur-

10 D. Gambera, 'Disarming Women: Gender and Poetic Authority from the *Thebaid* to the Knights' Tale', unpublished PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1995, p. 177, n. 37. Interestingly, the story of Phyllis, one of the minority of women in the *Legend of Good Women* who does not herself engage in some sort of Amazonian behavior, does suggest an oblique Amazonian connection. Phyllis is the daughter of the king of Thrace, as Chaucer indicates in the *House of Fame* (391), and Thrace was one of the lands from which Amazons were said to come.

11 Chaucer describes the fall of Troy at the beginning of the legend (930–45), mentions that Troy's destruction is painted in Dido's temple (1025–26), and repeatedly refers to Aeneas as 'this Troyan' (1172, see also 1211, 1265).

12 Chaucer writes of Theseus:

> For in his huntyng hath he swich delit
> That it is al his joye and appetit
> To been hymself the grete hertes bane,
> For after Mars he serveth now Dyane.
> Cleer was the day, and I have toold er this,
> And Theseus with alle joye and blis,
> With his Ypolita, the faire queene,
> And Emelye, clothed al in grene,
> On huntyng be they riden roially. (I 1679–87)

Venus's appearing to Aeneas as a huntress in the legend of Dido echoes his misrecognition of her as one of Diana's nymphs in the *Aeneid*. It also resonates with Palamon's mistaken identification of 'Emelye, Diana's votaress', for Venus, a misidentification that P. Olson reads as a 'comic epic reversal' of the aforementioned scene from the *Aeneid* ('Chaucer's Epic Statement and the Political Milieu of the Late Fourteenth Century', *Mediaevalia* 5 (1979), 61–87, at p. 71).

prising that Dido is grouped with the Amazons by the early modern writer Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, a catalogue in which Semiramis also appears.[13]

Finally, as I shall demonstrate shortly, Hypsipyle and Medea are, like Dido, good women implicated in the Theban and Trojan stories. They also take part in martial or violent actions at various points in their careers, as I illustrate in detail below. Indeed, as I argue in the next section, the joined legends of Hypsipyle and Medea provide thematically and paradigmatically central examples of the Amazonian incidents from old stories that haunt the *Legend of Good Women*.[14]

As is the battle between Theseus and the Amazons in the 'Knight's Tale', the military and militant aspects of the lives of Love's martyrs are typically mentioned only obliquely; the old stories are often heard as a faint echo. Such elements of the heroines' lives are not, however, just one more thing that Chaucer expunges for supposed purposes of irony or to which he gestures in passing as an inside joke aimed at those who knew their classics. Rather, the fleeting, yet ominous, presence of the political and military acts of these women has profound significance not only in the intertextual world of Chaucer's *corpus* but also in the politico-military world of Chaucer's England. Surprising though the claim might be, I contend that Chaucer's lives of Cupid's saints, like the 'Knight's Tale' with which the *Legend* is so strongly connected, are intimately concerned with women's roles, especially royal women's roles, in fourteenth-century political culture.

Old Stories, Politics, and Identity Formation

The 'Knight's Tale' seems perhaps an obvious text to investigate in exploring issues related to politics, conflict, and royal authority in Chaucer's work. Some critics have viewed it as a commentary on the Hundred Years' War. Paul Olson, for example, sees the tale as 'creating the mythos of the peace party' by 'making a speaking picture for the notion . . . that divine providence itself wants peace, a reconciliation with France, and a marriage'.[15] Lee Patterson reads in the tale's treatments of the 'central topics' of 'rivalry and

[13] K. Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham, NC, 2000), p. 18.

[14] The legends of Hypsipyle and Medea are also structurally central to the *Legend of Good Women*. If one counts Alceste, who appears in the Prologues, Medea is both preceded and followed by five good women (Alceste, Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, and Hypsipyle before; Lucretia, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis, and Hypermnestra after). Furthermore, the legends themselves (excluding the Prologues) are 2143 lines in length, beginning, in the *Riverside Chaucer*, at line 580. The midpoint of the legends is thus the couplet falling at 1651–2, toward the end of the legend of Medea: 'Now hath Jason the fles, and hom is went / With Medea, and tresor ful gret won.'

[15] Olson, 'Chaucer's Epic Statement', pp. 77–8.

governance' Chaucer's perceptions of the 'rifts' in the 'construct' of 'late fourteenth-century chivalric identity'.[16] Given the presence of the Amazon queen Hippolyta and her sister Emelye in the tale, it also seems an obvious text in which to examine how women feature in the politico-military sphere in Chaucer's writing.

Although many critics have also argued quite convincingly that the Prologues to the *Legend of Good Women* participate in conversations about Ricardian political crises of the 1380s, the text as a whole has not been much considered in relation to issues of political conflict.[17] Given the legends' focus on victimized, ever-faithful heroines, they might seem an especially unlikely place to explore political issues. Florence Percival, however, describes the *Legend* as being about the 'matter of Women', a phrase she coins by analogy to the 'matter of Britain' or the 'matter of Arthur'.[18] I would add that the 'matter of Women' as Chaucer presents it not only draws from some of the same classical sources as the 'matter of Britain' does (especially the stories of Thebes and Troy), but it also consequently shares with the 'matter of Britain' epic, historical dimensions that make them both useful raw material with which to frame political identities.[19]

In considering how such identities are framed, and the difficulties inherent in these processes, I would like to take Wallace's perceptive observation about the complicating force of Ariadne's legend on the 'Knight's Tale' a bit further. As we shall see, Ariadne's story is by no means the only one in the *Legend* that disrupts the Knight's idealization of Theseus and the accompanying triumphal vision of masculine authority on the field of battle and in the realm of politics. Furthermore, the tangle of associations between the tale and the *Legend* problematizes both texts.

In the 'Knight's Tale', the triumph of masculine authority begins with Theseus's conquest of Femenye, and its continuation depends on women's confirmation of that authority through their submission and meekness.[20] That

16 Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 179.

17 Indeed, the legends themselves have historically received far less critical attention of any kind than the Prologues. For examples of readings of the Prologues that consider fourteenth-century politics, see M. Hanrahan, 'Seduction and Betrayal: Treason in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*', *The Chaucer Review* 30 (1996), 229–40; S. Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's* Legend of Good Women (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994); P. Strohm's chapter 'Queens as Intercessors' in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992); and Wallace's chapter '"If That Thou Live": Legends and Lives of Good Women' in *Chaucerian Polity*.

18 Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, p. 14.

19 S. Federico, in *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 2003), explores the 'central role' of 'Trojan and post-Trojan women . . . as mediating figures in the enterprise of *translatio imperii*' (pp. xxiii–xxiv).

20 Mark Sherman makes a related point in his reading of the 'Knight's Tale'. He argues, 'The elaborate mechanism of the tale – in particular the building of the theater and the

Theseus's encounter with the pleading Argive women is juxtaposed to his triumphal return from the conquest of the Amazons introduces in miniature the dynamics constituting his authority. With their similarly suffering and pleading heroines, the legends would seem to present material conducive to the maintenance of masculine authority; however, the resemblance between Love's martyrs and the Amazons in the 'Knight's Tale' transforms the *Legend* from a record of feminine passivity into a record of feminine power to shake the foundations of symbolic and political systems dependent on their passivity.[21] The interplay between the texts dramatizes the difficulties Judith Butler sees in the 'process of meaning-constitution' that requires women to 'reflect . . . masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy'.[22] If, as Lee Patterson argues, the 'Knight's Tale' concerns itself with a crisis in masculine chivalric identity that has serious political consequences, an intertextual reading of the tale and the *Legend* illustrates that part of the crisis has to do with the vital symbolic roles – and correspondingly the vital political roles – women play in securing such identity.[23]

To understand the ways in which women's roles in 'olde stories' in the *Legend* and the 'Knight's Tale' resonate with Ricardian political culture, it is first necessary to flesh out the complex associations between the *Legend* and the 'Knight's Tale' a bit more fully, considering at the same time the texts' connections to Theban and Trojan material. The stories of Thebes and Troy were extremely influential in shaping English political self-conceptions during the upheaval in the later fourteenth century.[24] As Sylvia Federico

tournament performed therein – is constructed . . . as an allegorical psychomachia of Theseus's conquest of Femenye, a space in which to represent the drama of his, and the Knight's, general anxiety and animosity toward women' ('Politics of Discourse in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" ', *Exemplaria* 6 (1994), 87–114, at p. 101). My reading of Theseus contrasts with that of Jill Mann, who sees him as 'the fullest development of an ideal of feminised masculinity' (J. Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer* [Atlantic Heights, NJ, 1991], p. 171). She bases this reading on Theseus's demonstration of pity, which she terms a womanly virtue. Although Mann distinguishes 'feminised' from 'effeminate', I would argue that the tale works very hard to show that pity need not carry any traces of femininity, even seemingly positive ones.

21 Federico argues that the 'processes of fixing stable meaning' are themselves 'masculine', saying further that, 'The performance of masculinity inherent in the historiographical impulse is just that: a gendered masquerade that attempts to hide absence and loss' (*New Troy*, p. 146–7).

22 J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 45.

23 See Patterson's extremely persuasive reading of the 'Knight's Tale' in chapter 3 of *Chaucer and the Subject of History*.

24 Troy was not merely an English political touchstone. England's perennial foes across the Channel also made extensive political use of the Troy story. For one instance of such French engagement with Trojan material nearly contemporaneous with Chaucer's work, see Christine de Pizan's *Epistre d'Othéa*.

observes of the Troy story, 'Theories of identity and history . . . converge around the specter of this ancient fallen city.'[25] The stories of Thebes and Troy were also closely joined for fourteenth-century audiences. David Anderson notes that from 'the perspective of Chaucer's age', the siege and destruction of Thebes transpired 'shortly before the siege and destruction of Troy'.[26] Furthermore, he points out, 'To a vision of history predisposed to identifying correspondences in the histories of cities in the Babylonian succession, the classical accounts of the wars at Thebes and Troy offered some very attractive similarities'; for instance, as Anderson indicates, both began with a theft (of the throne in the case of Thebes; of Menelaus's wife Helen in the case of Troy) and played out through an extended siege waged by the wronged party.[27]

Theseus, the hero of the 'Knight's Tale' and an important villain in the *Legend*, provides a thematic as well as a historical connection between Thebes and Troy. Part of Theseus's career prefigures the beginning of the Trojan war, since he too once abducted Helen of Troy. He was also a key player in Theban history, defeating Creon, as depicted in the 'Knight's Tale'. In the *Polychronicon*, 'the most important universal chronicle compiled in England during the fourteenth century',[28] Ranulf Higden places Theseus's reign just prior to the Trojan war; furthermore, by altering slightly the typical version of the Athenian line of succession, Higden makes Theseus a human link between the two great conflicts. Higden has Demophon, the son of Theseus and Phedra, as Theseus's direct successor, omitting Menestheus from the line. Demophon becomes 'the king of Athens during the Trojan war', and he 'is said to have fought at Troy'.[29]

Thus, Theseus, who connects the 'Knight's Tale' and the *Legend*, also connects the stories of Thebes and Troy. Furthermore, the *Legend* is populated with women in addition to Ariadne with whom Theseus is associated in problematic ways in the course of these 'olde stories'. As Chaucer recounts, Theseus abandons 'Adryane his wyf' for 'hire syster' Phedra, who 'fayrer was than she' (2171–2). Phedra subsequently gives birth to Demophon, who encounters Phyllis on his voyage after the destruction of Troy. The legend of Phyllis contains numerous references to Demophon's 'fader Theseus' (2400; see also 2444, 2446, 2464) and the wickedness the son inherited from the father (2394–5; see also 2446–7, 2462–4, 2525–6, 2536–9, 2544–5).

25 Federico, *New Troy*, p. x. On Trojan history and fourteenth-century politics, see also Federico's earlier treatment of these topics in 'A Fourteenth-Century Erotics of Politics', SAC 19 (1997), 121–55. David Anderson discusses fourteenth-century explorations of the contemporary relevance of Theban and Trojan narratives in 'Theban History'.

26 Anderson, 'Theban History', pp. 109–10.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 118–9.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

29 *Ibid.*

Furthermore, as I discuss in detail below, Theseus has an encounter with Medea, who – although Chaucer does not mention it directly – marries Theseus's father Aegeus after Jason betrays her.

To make my case for the political significance of women's roles in old stories in Chaucer's portrayals of the saints of Cupid, I want to focus at some length on the jointly told legends of Hypsipyle and Medea. In critical discussion of these yoked legends, much attention has been given to the fact that the portrait of Medea ignores so much. Percival argues that Chaucer, alone among medieval authors who write about her, 'censored his Legend of all the detail which makes Medea's story interesting or even worth telling – there is almost nothing about her extensive magic powers, nothing about the procedures she devised to win the golden fleece, nothing about her revenge, to mention a few of the features that authors usually commented on.'[30] Chaucer's version of Hypsipyle's story also suppresses certain elements; for one thing, she has a long, yet untold, life after her encounter with Jason, and for another, her story does not in fact have the tragic end that Chaucer presents, since she is reunited with her sons.

Chaucer does drop enough hints to call to mind some of the absent elements of these stories. He includes Hysipyle's prayer that her successor as Jason's partner 'Moste fynden hym untrewe to hir also, / And that she moste bothe hire chyldren spylle' (1573–4). One element of Hypsipyle's untold history to which Chaucer alludes is of special significance to our purposes. When Hypsipyle is introduced, we are told that Jason and the Argonauts have landed on Lemnos, 'And of this ile lady was and quene / The fayre yonge Ysiphele, the shene, / That whylom Thoas doughter was, the kyng' (1466–8). The fact that she is the reigning queen and is described as 'whylom Thoas doughter' – that is, *formerly* King Thoas's daughter – speaks volumes.

The way that Hypsipyle became queen and the circumstances that led to Thoas's departure from the throne are recounted in Book 5 of Statius's *Thebaid* – the text with which Boccaccio works in the *Teseida*, the text which Chaucer invokes as his source in the 'Knight's Tale', and the text which may also be a source for his legend of Hypsipyle. The relevant portion of the story is this: One night on Lemnos, all the women were driven mad by Venus and killed all the men. Hypsipyle refused to kill her father, but he had to flee for obvious reasons, and with Bacchus's aid he reached safety. After the night of violence, the Lemnian women chose Hypsipyle to rule as queen. Additionally, although in the *Legend* Hypsipyle graciously welcomes Jason, Hercules, and company, only to be 'bedote' (1547) afterward, it is worth remembering that in Statius's account Hypsipyle's 'welcome' to Jason and the Argonauts is a rain of spears hurled by the Lemnian women from the city walls.

The scenes of the Lemnian women's mass murder of men and armed resis-

30 Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, p. 210.

tance to male invasion are, in a word, Amazonian. If we did, as Chaucer suggests, 'rede / Th'origynal, that telleth al the cas' (1557–8), we would be forced to confront Hypsipyle's Amazonian qualities directly. Disa Gambera has persuasively argued that Boccaccio based his account of the battle between Teseo and the Amazons, the very material raised only to be dismissed at the beginning of the 'Knight's Tale', on the story of Hypsipyle and the Lemnian women found in Book 5 of the *Thebaid*.[31] With the legend of Hypsipyle, Chaucer subtly calls attention to the Lemnian / Amazonian histories that lie behind the purportedly happy marriages between men and Amazons in the 'Knight's Tale' as well as behind the suffering female fidelity of the *Legend*.

Although Chaucer does not refer to his possible source Statius in the legend of Hypsipyle and Medea, he does mention another source prominently: Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiana*. He opens the legend of Hypsipyle with the line, 'In Tessalie, as Guido tellith us' (1396), and he again refers to Guido by name later in the legend (1464). Percival reads these references, along with Chaucer's inclusion of language from Guido about form and matter in the opening of the Medea's legend, as evidence of Chaucer's humorous or satiric purpose. She argues that 'even more damaging' than Chaucer's use of material from Ovid emphasizing Medea's 'gullibility and infatuation' is 'Chaucer's reference to his source in Guido del Colonne (1396, 1464), part of the learned Latin tradition which condemned Medea so comprehensively, in contrast to the milder vernacular versions like that of Benoît.'[32] I want to consider the references to Guido in a somewhat different light, exploring what it means for Chaucer to invoke a source devoted to the story of Troy in presenting Medea's life. Since Chaucer gestures toward Medea's involvement in 'olde stories' let us consider her participation and its implications.

In Guido's *Historia*, Medea's story 'forms part of the history of Troy in that before his arrival in Colchis Jason's voyage had taken him to the shores of the first city of Troy, where he was badly received.' This encounter led to the first destruction of Troy and its rebuilding by Priam. 'Medea's part in this story extends from Jason's arrival in Colchis to his flight with her after winning the Fleece.' Guido's account also briefly looks forward to Jason's betrayal of Medea.[33]

31 Gambera writes, 'Although there are many sources for the battle between Theseus and Hippolyta, Boccaccio links his version with Book Five of the *Thebaid* by repeated references to the night the Amazons killed their husbands even going so far as to name one of Ipolita's emissaries, Polisto, the name of the woman who is first possessed by the "horrendas furias" which results in the murders of the Lemnian men' ('Disarming Women', pp. 165–66).

32 Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, p. 214.

33 J. Cowen, 'Women as Exempla in Fifteenth-Century Verse of the Chaucerian Tradition', *King's College London Medieval Studies* 5 (1991), 51–64, at p. 55.

Furthermore, because Medea has an encounter with Theseus following Jason's betrayal of her, she, like Theseus, becomes a link between the stories of Thebes and Troy. After taking revenge on Jason, Medea flees to Athens, where she marries Theseus's father Aegeus, with whom she has a son. Feeling that Theseus represents a threat to her son's chances of gaining the throne, Medea decides to dispatch the hero. Accordingly, she has Aegeus send Theseus, whom he does not recognize, to tame the Marathonian bull. This effort to cause Theseus's death fails, so Medea tries to kill him with poison. Just as Theseus raises the poisoned cup to his lips, Aegeus recognizes his sword, knows his son's identity, and saves him. It is not surprising that these episodes of hostility toward Theseus do not make it into the *Legend of Good Women*. Chaucer was cognizant of them, though. Boccaccio discusses the poisoning incident in detail in his glosses on the *Teseida*, a juxtaposition of stories that emphasizes Medea's Amazonian qualities.[34]

Another aspect of Medea's participation in 'olde stories' haunts the *Legends*, bringing even more distressing dimensions to the text's portrayals of female virtue. When Jason and Medea return to Iolcus, she restores the youth of Jason's father Aeson, who had been prevented from taking the throne by his half-brother Pelias. Hoping to attain the kingdom for Jason, she convinces Pelias's daughters to try to rejuvenate their father as she had done Aeson. In a scene somewhat reminiscent of Procne and Philomela's macabre meal preparation, upon Medea's instructions, Pelias's daughters chop him up and boil him. As Janet Cowen observes, Medea's 'instigation of the killing of Pelias . . . is prominent in Ovid's story of Medea in the *Metamorphoses*', so it certainly would have been familiar to Chaucer.[35] Also familiar to Chaucer would have been Boccaccio's account of this episode in *De Mulieribus Claris*. Boccaccio writes that Medea, with 'arte sua zizaniam inter natas et Peliam sevit easque misere *armavit in patrem*'.[36] The description of Medea arming Pelias's daughters against their father gives the episode a distinctly Amazonian quality.

Once again, this is not an episode to which Chaucer refers directly. He does, however, call attention to the figure of Pelias (whose name, following Guido, he spells Pelleus) at the beginning of the legend of Hypsipyle. Recounting Jason's ancestry, he writes:

> In Tessalie, as Guido tellith us,
> There was a kyng that highte Pelleus,
> That hadde a brother which that highte Eson;
> And whan for age he myghte unnethes gon,

34 Gambera, 'Disarming Women', p. 177 n. 37.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

36 G. Boccaccio, *De Mulieribus Claris*, vol. 10 of *Tutte Le Opere de Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittorio Zaccaria, n.p.: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1967, p. 86, my emphasis.

He yaf to Pelleus the governyng
Of al his regne and made hym lord and kyng.
Of which Eson this Jason geten was. (1396–1402)

Even more compelling is the way in which Chaucer in effect hides the story of Medea, Pelias, and his daughters in plain sight in the *Legend of Good Women*. One of the daughters of Pelias whom Medea 'arms' against him is none other than Alceste.[37] Even this best of the good women who went to Hades to save her husband Admetus's life has an 'Amazonian' past.

Furthermore, Alceste, not generally seen as having much of a connection to the Theban/Trojan 'olde stories' is given one – as well as another connection, albeit a rather distant one, with Amazons – by Guido delle Colonne, the authority that Chaucer sites repeatedly in the legend of Hypsipyle and Medea. As I mentioned, Chaucer adopted Guido's spelling of 'Pelleus' for 'Pelias'. With it, presumably, he adopted Guido's understanding of this character's identity. As C. David Benson notes, 'We will remember that because of his source Guido believed that Peleus of Thessaly (whose nephew Jason brought about the first destruction of Troy) was also the father of Achilles.'[38] Achilles, in Guido's version thus Alceste's sibling, kills Hector of Troy; his son Pirrus kills Troy's last champion, the Amazon Penthisilea.[39]

Carolyn Dinshaw argues that there is 'perhaps . . . something slightly unsettling' about Alceste. She is aggressive towards the narrator (F 475), shape-shifts in the poem, and her 'critical reputation might itself serve as a testament to a certain ambivalence in her reputation'.[40] Dinshaw in the end

[37] Although Alceste's participation in Pelias's murder is, not surprisingly, generally absent from accounts of her virtue in medieval texts, her relationship to Pelias would have been known in connection with her marriage to Admetus, the source of her virtuous reputation. It is Pelias's promise to give his daughter Alcestis to whomever can yoke a lion and a boar to a chariot that leads to her marriage to Admetus. Apollo yokes the beasts and gives them to Admetus, who presents them to Pelias.

[38] C.D. Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature: Guido delle Colonne's* Historia Destructionis Troiae *in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1980), p. 155, n. 53. In the first book of the *Historia*, which bears the heading 'Incipit liber primus de Peleo rege Thesalie inducente Iasonem vt se conferat ad aurem uellus habendum', Guido writes, 'In regno Thesalie, de predicte scilicet prouinciis Romanie cuius incole Mirmidones dicti sunt, quod nos hodie uulgari denominatione Saloncium appellamus, regnabat tunc temporis rex quidam iustus et nobilis nomine Pelleus cum eius consorte Thetide nuncupata. Ex quorum matrimonio processit vir ille tam fortis tam animosus tam strenuus denominatus Acchilles' (Guido de Columnis, *Historia Descructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin [Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1936; New York: Kraus, 1970], p. 5). In his index of proper names, under the entry for 'Peleus, Pelleus' Griffin notes, 'Benoît and Guido have made one person of Dares' Pelias, uncle of Jason, and Dares's Peleus, participant in the first destruction of Troia' (*ibid.*, p. 289).

[39] In other accounts, Achilles himself kills Penthisilea.

[40] C. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI, 1989), p. 71.

concludes that the narrator 'does in fact have this disturbing female under control'.[41] I would argue that Alceste's Amazonian associations make her an even more unsettling figure than Dinshaw suggests. They also raise the possibility that, even if the narrator has her temporarily 'under control', she may not stay that way. She appears as a merciful intercessor and wise councilor this time, but one wonders where she might be keeping her knife.

Amazonian Queens, or Gender Trouble as Political Trouble

We have seen how many of the saints of Cupid participate in the stories of Thebes and Troy, and how several of these women, including Alceste herself, share with Hippolyta and Emelye an 'Amazonian' heritage that colors their participation in these stories. There is one final respect in which Hypsipyle and Medea are central to the *Legend of Good Women*. Like Hippolyta, both Hypsipyle and Medea are queens, and they share queenship with Alceste, Cleopatra, and Dido within the legends. When queens have Amazonian identities, the problematic dimensions of such identities grow exponentially.

Although I said previously that the Amazonian heritage of Hippolyta and Emelye in the 'Knight's Tale' make that text a likely place to explore women, conflict, and politics in Chaucer's writing, in fact, as many readers have noted, the Amazonian identity of Hippolyta and Emelye plays almost no role at all in the tale. Hippolyta and Emelye are foreign women brought home and 'domesticated'.[42] They are turned into women who embody precisely the 'proper', heavily gendered, roles accepted for medieval royal women. They play the part of the intercessor, as when they plead with Theseus to moderate

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 72. Strohm also addresses Alceste's doubleness, arguing that her portrayal brings together contradictory versions of the tradition of queenly intercession. She is 'on the one hand, conceived within the purest of self-abnegating traditions', yet she is 'more or less simultaneously portrayed as a giver of practical and sound advice to princes, a one-time ruler in her own right, a hard negotiator, and a stern commentator on the narrator's deserts' ('Queens as Intercessors', p. 114).

[42] Dinshaw uses a similar, gendered idea of domestication to describe the Chaucerian narrator's treatment of source materials in the *Legend of Good Women*. She writes, 'Stripped, clipped, and scrubbed, his pagan sources are like female bodies in the narrator's masculine hands. As he promised, he indeed delivers the "naked text" (86) of the legends. His *translatio* this time is not the record of his seduction but is, rather, a record of his continual exercise of control over the feminine. He domesticates the alien woman – marries her, settles her down in his household . . .' (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, p. 86). My reading of the legends is somewhat different, since I see the 'pagan source texts', and indeed the women whose stories they tell, as incompletely 'domesticated'. While Dinshaw sees masculine literary authority ultimately to be undermined by reductiveness that leads to silence, in my view, it is the inevitably incomplete domestication of the source texts and their subjects that poses the greatest threat to masculine authority, political as well as literary.

his angry response to Palamon and Arcite's battle in the grove, and that of the 'peaceweaver' who ties together a political alliance, as the marriage of Emelye and Palamon does for Athens and Thebes.[43] The 'Knight's Tale' ends with a description of the blissful relationship of Palamon and Emelye, in which, we are told, there is never any 'word hem bitwene / Of jalousie or any oother teene' (I 3105–6). The Amazonian past of Palamon's bride, like that of Theseus's wife Hippolyta, is firmly repressed.[44]

One does wonder, though, what it might actually *mean* to be married to an Amazon, particularly one who would have preferred, as Emelye says in her prayer to Diana, 'to ben a mayden al my lyf' pursuing 'huntynge and venerye' and walking 'in the wodes wilde' (I 2305–9). Considering repression's inevitable lack of complete success, this closing vision of domestic harmony seems always under threat, and with it the alliance of Athens and Thebes. In her analysis of early modern texts about Amazons, Kathryn Schwarz notes that when men ' "win" in Amazon encounters, they reconstitute patriarchal structures through an aggressive artificiality'.[45] In other words, the matrimonial resolutions suggest in their very nature their potential, possibly unavoidable, undoing. Schwarz observes of Shakespeare's *Two Noble Kinsmen* (which also tells the story of Palamon, Arcite, and Emily), 'In a play in which everything seems finally to be in place – men, women, homosocialty and heterosexuality, frame narrative and the narratives they frame – the perversity of amazonian endings becomes fully clear. Heterosexual desire breaks up a homosocial utopia, heroic masculinity is self-destructive in its triumph; the winner dies and the loser gets the Amazon. What are we to think?'[46] Reading the 'Knight's Tale' in dialogue with the *Legend* suggests some of the things about which we *should* think concerning the inherent dangers of turning women warriors into wives, or, more broadly, concerning the dangers of relying on rigidly constrained models of feminine – especially queenly – identity to cement political alliances and shore up masculine authority.

Anxieties about alliances and authority were very much present in the historical environment of the *Legend of Good Women*. Lynn Staley has argued quite convincingly for seeing certain kinds of Lancastrian strategies and self-representations as originating with John of Gaunt in the reign of Richard

43 On intercession as an idealized queenly activity, with particular reference to Alceste, Anne of Bohemia, and the *Legend of Good Women*, see Strohm, 'Queens as Intercessors'. On feminine intercession in the 'Knight's Tale', see Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, pp. 116–19.

44 On the repression of Hippolyta's and Emelye's Amazonian identity in the 'Knight's Tale', see Wallace's chapter ' "No Felaweshipe": Thesian Polity', in *Chaucerian Polity*, especially pp. 107–9.

45 Schwarz, *Tough Love*, p. 45.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

II.[47] In my view, certain fears that characterize Lancastrian political culture, especially the culture of Anglo-French relations, also have roots in Richard II's reign. In the Lancastrian period, the unease, both founded and unfounded, that Margaret of Anjou spawned reveals fears that the political stability of the English monarchy, and perhaps even more significantly, symbolically vital monarchical masculinity, were under threat from a foreign woman 'brought home' like Hippolyta and Emelye to make an alliance through marriage. Such concerns were current in Richard's era as well, since both of his marriages to foreign queens (Anne of Bohemia and Isabella of France) prompted, as we shall see, expressions of concern.

Furthermore, the maintenance of precisely the kind of masculine identity purportedly embodied by Theseus, Palamon, and the Cupid of the *Legend* was a matter of no small political consequence for Richard II. Richard's desire to pursue peace with France left him open to criticism by those who viewed the practice of arms as fundamental to chivalric manhood – those who subscribed to Froissart's view that 'li vaillant homme' fought wars 'pour avancer leurs corps et acoistre leur honneur'.[48] A peace-loving king had to work hard not to be seen as an effeminate, and so illegitimate, king. Matters were made more difficult for Richard since those who felt he was ill-suited to rule repeatedly called his masculinity into question. Michael Hanrahan observes, 'Thomas Walsingham unmistakably establishes the sexual threat posed by Richard's favorites', and he points out that Adam of Usk makes 'overt reference to Richard's sodomy'. Hanrahan continues, 'The charge of sodomy was never officially brought against Richard, but its occurrence in these Lancastrian chronicles betrays the political agenda behind the allegations, namely, Richard's unfitness to rule.'[49]

One way to avoid royal 'gender trouble', and hence political trouble, was to ensure feminine submissiveness, both sexual and social. It is significant to note that in his *Epistre au Roi Richart*, written to attempt to convince Richard II to resolve the war with France through marriage, Philippe de Mézières emphasizes feminine submissiveness, so forestalling any doubts about Richard's masculinity. He hopes that God will grant Richard 'une telle espouse et compaingne comme il fist au marquis de Saluce, apelee

47 L. Staley, 'Gower, Richard II, Henry of Derby, and the Business of Making Culture', *Speculum* 75 (2000), 68–96. Staley demonstrates that 'the desire to create a textual record of Richard's lapses, which we tend to associate with Henry IV and his archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel', did not begin 'with Henry's accession to the throne.' Rather, she argues that there was 'a textual "campaign" waged, not necessarily *against* Richard, but *for* Henry of Derby' in the 1390s 'by one of the most experienced political figures of the century, John of Gaunt' (*ibid.*, 82).

48 J. Froissart, *Chroniques* 2:179, quoted by Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 174, n. 20.

49 Hanrahan, 'Seduction and Betrayal', p. 235.

Griseldis'[50] ['a wife such as Griselda, the wife of the Marquis of Saluzzo'[51]]. He goes on to explain that according to 'la cronique autentique' of Petrarch, 'depuis le commencement du monde jusques au jour duy, apres les saintes, ne se treuve pas femme si vertuueuse en escript, ne si merveilleuse en l'amour de son seigneur, et merueilleuse vertu de pacience, comme fu la dicte noble marquise Griseldis'[52] [according to Petrarch's 'authentic chronicle . . . there is no record from the beginning of the world until today, apart from the saints, of a woman of such great virtue, nor so loving towards her husband, nor of such marvellous patience, as this same Lady Griselda'[53]].

Mézières also spends considerable time discussing the 'training of women'[54] ['la doctrine des femmes'[55]]. He recommends that Richard choose a young wife whom he can instruct in proper queenly conduct. Invoking Esther, that frequently-used model for queens, he writes:

> [N]e vault il pas mieulx que la dame qu'il prendra pour sa compaigne et espouse, des son enfance et avant qu'elle ait discrecion d'encorporer en son ygaginacion les choses nuysables, par la prudence et sage ordenance de la royale majeste du dit fin dyamant figure soit bien nourrie et saintement endoctrinee, premierement en la doubtance et amour de Dieu, comme fu la sainte royne Hester, et apres en bonnes meurs royales, et es condicions et bonnes volentez de son seigneur et mary . . .?[56]
>
> ['(W)ould it not be better that the lady he chooses as helpmeet and wife, from her childhood, before reaching the age of discretion and before acquiring harmful habits of mind, should be well nurtured and instructed under the prudent and wise guidance of the royal majesty of the rich diamond, first in the fear and love of God, like the saintly Queen Esther, and, next, in royal behavior, according to the station and will of her lord and husband . . .?'[57]]

The message is clear – a king need not prevail on the field of battle to prove his manhood; Mézières's letter demonstrates that prevailing over his wife will suffice.

Richard II's second marriage, to the child-bride Isabella of France, who

50 Philippe de Mézières, *Letter to King Richard II*, ed. and trans. G.W. Coopland (Liverpool, 1975), p. 115.
51 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
52 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
54 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
55 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
56 *Ibid.*, 142. On the importance of feminine, wifely submissiveness in confirming Richard II's masculine authority as king, see Federico's reading of Richard Maidstone's *Concordia* (*New Troy*, pp. 18–28); I also discuss the *Concordia* in the final section of this essay.
57 Mézières, *Letter to Richard II*, p. 68.

clearly filled Mézières's bill of youth and impressionability, took place well after Chaucer had written at least a first version of the *Legend of Good Women* (the version of the F prologue) and after he had written at least some early version of the 'Knight's Tale' (the tale of 'al the love of Palamon and Arcite' mentioned in the F prologue). Some have argued, though, that the revision of the Prologue of the *Legend* may be connected to the marriage,[58] and D.W. Robertson goes so far as to propose a very late date for the 'Knight's Tale' in order to argue for its convergence with the marriage.[59] While I am not particularly convinced by either of these arguments, it is instructive to consider the marriage between Richard and Isabella as an example of the ways in which a foreign queen might become a liability rather than an asset, even when, like Isabella, the queen in question would appear to have everything going for her.

As Andrew Taylor has observed, the role of the foreign queen is 'perilous', not only for her, as Taylor suggests, but also, I would argue, for the court to which she comes as well.[60] There are two related problems. First, a foreign queen may pose a concrete political threat, since she may have (or, much the same in the end, may be perceived as having) her own agenda biased toward her natal realm. She may also pose a perhaps even more serious – because less easily contained – symbolic threat if she escapes preconceived, strictly gendered models of queenship.

The marriage between Richard and Isabella seemed ideal in terms of sealing Anglo-French peace (at least for those who wanted peace), and Isabella seemed a perfectly submissive and malleable queen. However, much as the exemplary Esther invoked by Mézières cannot, as Paul Strohm has argued, finally be read solely as a meek intercessor, so too Isabella turned out not to fit perfectly into the queenly role envisioned for her.[61] Child-bride though she was, Isabella was also a female foreigner and so inspired English unease. Nigel Saul points out, 'As Anglo-French relations worsened . . . she and her entourage became the object of criticism. Complaints were made about the size and possibly too the activities, of Isabella's attendants, and a dozen or more . . . were sent home to France.'[62]

58 See J.H. Fisher, 'The Revision of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*: An Occasional Explanation', *South Atlantic Bulletin* 43 (1978), 75–84.

59 Robertson claims, 'There is a strong possibility that the Knight's comic epic tale was composed either to encourage or to celebrate Richard's marriage to his French bride as a solution to the "fraternal strife" that plagued relationships between Christian England and Christian France' (D.W. Robertson, 'The Probable Date and Purpose of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', *Studies in Philology* 84 [1987], 418–39, at p. 439).

60 A. Taylor, 'Anne of Bohemia and the Making of Chaucer', SAC 19 (1997), 95–119, at p. 102.

61 On Esther as a 'potentially effective and forthright counselor' as well as a meek intercessor, see Strohm, 'Queens as Intercessors'.

62 N. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, 1997), p. 457. In relation to cultural anxieties about

More temporally relevant to the *Legend* and the 'Knight's Tale' is Richard's first marriage to Anne of Bohemia, a figure who is (at least possibly) mentioned in both of the texts.[63] Anne, too, was a figure who inspired some discomfort upon her arrival in England. Walsingham wrote critically of her and her court, and Anne was 'the object of scorn' when she arrived in London with 'no dowry . . . and an impecunious train of courtiers who probably spoke as little English as she did.' Anne as a foreign queen, however, seems to have been politically astute enough to manage to get what Taylor calls 'the good part'.[64] Richard and Anne's marriage was famously a happy one. The relationship between king and queen seems to have been precisely the sort of harmonious marriage pictured at the end of the 'Knight's Tale'. Anne was also celebrated for her peerless performance of the idealized queenly role of intercessor, earning the epithet 'benignissima domina' from Adam of Usk.[65]

With her ability to transcend anxieties about her presence in England, her evidently happy marriage, and her well-publicized intercessory abilities, Anne would seem the epitome of queenly desirability. However, just as Amazonian identities lurk behind the tableau of the pleading Hippolyta and Emelye, just as violent agency resides behind the suffering facades of Cupid's passive saints, and just as the devoted intercessor Alceste, whom Anne so resembles, has a troublingly 'Amazonian' past, queen Anne as devoted wife and intercessor is not a stable construct. Concomitantly, the strongly masculine royal identity which, as Strohm has shown, wifely

French influence at the English court, I would note in passing here that what John Bowers sees as Chaucer's English nationalism and his resistant engagement of the 'hegemonic French tradition' of courtly literature beginning with the *Legend of Good Women* intersects in interesting ways with the Anglo-French political issues at stake in the texts under discussion here ('Chaucer after Smithfield: From Postcolonial Writer to Imperialist Author', in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen [New York, 2000], pp. 53–66, at pp. 53–4).

63 The possible reference to Anne in the 'Knight's Tale' is the line, 'And of the tempest at hir hoom-comynge' (I 884), in the description of Ypolita's arrival in Athens. As the *Riverside Chaucer* editors point out, this line 'is often taken as an allusion to Queen Anne's arrival in England on 18 December 1381, but the allusion is by no means certain' (p. 826; see J.L. Lowes, 'The Tempest at hir Hoom-Cominge', *Modern Language Notes* 19 [1904], 240–43). In addition to seeing aspects of Anne in Alceste, as many readers have done, one finds reference to her in the *Legend of Good Women* in the God of Love's famous directive, present in the F Prologue but removed from the G version, 'And whan this book is maad, yive it the quene, / On my behalf, at Eltham or at Sheene' (496–7).

64 Taylor, 'Anne of Bohemia and the Making of Chaucer,' p. 95; Taylor quotes Walsingham's criticism of Anne and her courtiers (*Historia Anglicana* 2:97) p. 102, n. 27.

65 Adam of Usk, *Chronicon Adae de Usk*, ed. and trans. Edward Maunde Thompson, 2nd edn (London, 1904), p. 8.

submission and queenly intercession are designed to enhance, is itself unstable.[66]

I turn briefly to Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*, a text nearly contemporaneous with the *Legend* and the 'Knight's Tale', to illustrate the representational and political problems that ensue when a fourteenth-century queen turns out to be an Amazon. This text recounts the pageantry of the king's reconciliation with the city of London in 1392. Not surprisingly, Anne is cast as the adoring wife and merciful intercessor for the citizens of London. Maidstone writes: 'Flectere regales poterit regina rigores, / Mitis ut in gentem rex velit esse suam. / Mollit amore virum mulier: Deus huic dedit illam; / Tendat ad hoc vester, o pia, dulcis amor'[67] [Let the queen soften royal severity that the king may be forbearing to his people. A woman mellows a man with love: for this God gave her; for this, O blessed woman, may your sweet love aspire.[68]]. Accordingly, at the end of the day of ceremony, Anne kneels before Richard and begs him to pardon the city.

Significantly, Anne herself refers to the Troy story, and its relevance to Britain, in her entreaty to Richard, a reference that is particularly appropriate since Anne of Bohemia's father, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, claimed descent from Aeneas.[69] She says, 'Tempora post Bruti regumque peracta priorum, / Quamvis et Arthurus annumeretur eis, / Non fuerat cuiquam regi datus hic morituro / Tantus honor quantum contulit ista dies.'[70] ['Never to any mortal king on this island since the times of Brutus and the first kings – even if Arthur is numbered among them – never has an honor been given as great as this day conferred upon you.'[71]] With this speech, Anne joins the chorus, in which Chaucer too participated, of fourteenth-century voices suggesting the importance of the Trojan past to the Ricardian present. As we have seen from our intertextual reading of the *Legend of Good Women* and the 'Knight's Tale', one of the things he *could* have learned from these old stories is that 'Amazons will out'.

Indeed, the Amazon does come out both in the Prologues to the *Legend*

66 In his discussion of Queen Philippa's intercession with Edward III for the burghers of Calais, Strohm argues that 'physically weak but spiritually elevated women' are 'so very satisfying to men' because they 'affir[m] maleness' ('Queens as Intercessors', pp. 103–4). He continues, 'An idea of "the female" is, of course, necessary for the construction of "the male". Froissart's depiction of Philippa as hyper-female – as marginal, maternal, abject, emotional – provides an essential counterpart to his depiction of Edward as hyper-male – obtrusive, paternal, proud, legalistic' (*ibid.*, p. 104).

67 R. Maidstone, '*Concordia facta inter regem Riccardum II et civitatem Londonie*', ed. and trans. Charles Roger Smith, unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1972, p. 190 lines 229–32.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

69 Federico, *New Troy*, pp. xii–xiii.

70 Maidstone, *Concordia*, p. 218, lines 481–84.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

and in the *Concordia*, complicating constructions of queenly intercession. In the Prologues, Alceste calls herself 'your Alceste, whilom quene of Trace' (F 432, G 422). Thrace is a confusion for Thessaly, as the notes in the *Riverside Chaucer* indicate,[72] but one might also – or instead – read this 'confusion' as a repression, conscious or unconscious, of Thessaly, Alceste's true home and the place mentioned at the opening of the legend of Hypsipyle and Medea. Associating Alceste with Thessaly in close proximity to the reminder of Medea's connection with that realm in her legend would bring Alceste's involvement in the murder of her father, the king of Thessaly, at Medea's instruction too close for comfort. Ironically, but not unexpectedly, given the dynamics of repression, the attempt to erase an Amazonian past calls forth that very thing. Thrace, which replaces Thessaly, is, like Libya from which Alceste's fellow good queen Dido hails, one of the areas known as the Amazons' homeland. The displacement of Alceste from Thessaly, the scene of her Amazonian behavior, to Thrace places her squarely in Amazonian territory, so to speak. Correspondingly, the aggressiveness that punctuates her intercessory performance gains heightened significance, carrying potentially sinister implications.

In the *Concordia*, when Maidstone praises Anne's beauty, he writes, 'Pulchra quidem pulcris stat circumcincta puellis; / Vincit Amazonibus Troia novella sub hiis.'[73] ['Very beautiful herself, she stands surrounded by beautiful maidens; the New Troy conquers under these Amazons.'[74]] Although Maidstone evidently uses the description of Anne as an Amazon positively, the baggage the Amazon carries disrupts his efforts to case her as a meek, submissive intercessory figure. Federico points out that 'Anne as an Amazon allied with New Troy is a figure for, most likely, Penthesilea, the warrior queen who came to the aid of the Trojans.' As she observes, this description 'exert[s] a destabilizing influence on Maidstone's declared position', since Richard is 'suddenly on the wrong side of the Trojan war. . . . Richard comes into New Troy and is conquered, defeated by a woman warrior in league with an impressive civic army.'[75]

Chaucer's Amazonian Alceste and Maidstone's Amazonian Anne demonstrate that 'out' Amazons do not 'maintain the power to reflect or represent the "reality" of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject'.[76]

72 The *Riverside Chaucer*'s editors reference Francis P. Magoun, Jr., on this point. Magoun notes that 'Thrace has untraditionally been confused with or substituted for Thessaly. . . . Alcestis is spoken of as *whilom quene of Trace*, whereas her husband Admetus was king of Pelagis, a district of Thessaly' ('Chaucer's Ancient and Biblical World', *Medieval Studies* 15 [1953], 107–36, at p. 132, emphasis in original).

73 Maidstone, p. 178, lines 123–24

74 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

75 Federico, 'A Fourteenth-Century Erotics of Politics', p. 152; see also chapter 1 of *New Troy*.

76 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 45.

Women, especially queens, who bear arms, who fight, who move beyond the identities of intercessors and peaceweavers, can no longer serve as a 'guarantor[s] of an apparent masculine subject position' constituent of royal authority because they are no longer 'precisely what men are not'.[77]

If the *Legend* and the 'Knight's Tale' present some sort of advice to Richard, as many have argued – and I believe – that they do, the advice is multi-faceted. The texts do indeed suggest, as Wallace and Strohm argue, that a king should listen to wise council, especially when it comes from women. They also suggest that a king should not expect intercession and council to be the only forms of behavior in which a queen might engage.

The dynamic intertextuality of the *Legend* and the 'Knight's Tale' demonstrate that even evidently passive, victimized, women can 'turn'. Active, oppositional, female agency – perhaps even armed agency – lurks as a perennial source of trouble beneath models of royal female identity seemingly beneficial to masculine authority. The armed woman hides in the peaceweaver's shadow, and the Amazon is the reverse of the coin of the intercessory queen. The political and symbolic economies dependent on the currency of female passivity are thus always under threat.

[77] *Ibid.*

5

Remembering the Game: Debating the *Legend*'s Women

BETSY MCCORMICK

The idea of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* as an entry in the ludic debate over the nature of 'Woman' is usually assumed rather than addressed in contemporary scholarship. Certainly, the terms 'ludic', 'game' and 'play' have become more frequent in recent Chaucerian criticism – for instance, Florence Percival's *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* addresses the *Legend*'s ludic aspects; however, a detailed analysis of the nature of the game being played within the *Legend* in light of game theory and game's relationship to memory and culture remains to be made.[1] Despite the tendency to assume that the ludic precludes any serious consequences, literary

[1] Percival's *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (Cambridge, 1998) also sees the *Legend* as a literary game about the nature of 'Woman' and examines its fourteenth-century cultural context, but does not expand into the broader context of game/play theory. A.J. Minnis defines the *Legend* as a game, but sees it as a world-upside-down gender game in his 'Introduction to the *Legend of Good Women*', in *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems*, ed. A.J. Minnis, V.J. Scattergood and J.J. Smith (Oxford, 1995), pp. 322–454, at pp. 434–54. For general discussions of game/play in relation to medieval literature, see J. Leyerle, 'The Game and Play of the Hero', in *Concepts of the Hero in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* , ed. N. Burns and C. Reagan (Albany, 1975), pp. 49–82 and G. Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1982). Ludic analysis has been much more predominant in studies of specific medieval texts, particularly troubadour lyrics and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Most Chaucerian game analysis has focused on the *Canterbury Tales*; see for example, G.D. Josipovici, 'Fiction and Game in *The Canterbury Tales*', *Critical Quarterly* 7 (1965), 185–97; G. Joseph, 'Chaucerian "Game" – "Earnest" and the "Argument of Herbergage"', in *The Canterbury Tales*', *Chaucer Review* 5 (1970–1), 83–96; Beryl Rowland, 'The Play of the *Miller's Tale*: A Game Within a Game', *Chaucer Review* 5 (1970), 140–6; R. Lanham, 'Games and High Seriousness', in *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven, 1976), pp. 65–81; S. Manning, 'Rhetoric, Game, Morality and Geoffrey Chaucer', SAC 1 (1979), 105–118; C. Lindahl, *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales* (Bloomington, 1987); and L. Kendrick, *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley, 1988).

games do highlight serious cultural and ethical concerns. Indeed, game theory argues that there is a vital connection among play, culture, ethics and memory, and between games and the societies that create and play them.

Game theory falls into two broad categories: cultural theories of play, developed in both the humanities and the social sciences, and mathematical theories (most familiar through terms such as 'zero-sum game' and 'war game').[2] Yet even within the disciplines there is still difficulty in defining and theorizing game. This is one reason why Brian Sutton-Smith has called attention to the ambiguity of play, concluding that 'In [my] forty years of pursuing the meaning of play, it has become apparent that an understanding of play's ambiguity requires the help of multiple disciplines.'[3] Such ambiguity is driven not only by game's multi-disciplinary context, but also by our understanding of game itself. Brian Edwards notes that the essential distinction between the terms 'game' and 'play' is an important one to keep in mind: 'Although they are often related, game and play are not synonymous. As activities that are finite and rule-governed, games involve play but play is not bound to games.'[4] While the study of game is certainly more limited than that of the larger realm of play, it proves to be just as ambiguous: for instance, one of the central concerns within literary game theory is whether the game is found within the text itself, or is played between the author and the reader, or between the reader and the text.[5] Again Sutton-Smith con-

2 For the foundations of cultural play/game theory see J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston, 1950); E. Avedon and B. Sutton-Smith, *The Study of Games* (New York, 1971); D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London, 1971); G. Bateson, 'A Metalogue: About Games and Being Serious', and 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy', in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972), pp. 14–20 and 177–93; C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973); E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, 1974); Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York, 1982).

3 B. Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, 1997), p. vii. See his first chapter and bibliography for the multi-disciplinary nature of game theory.

4 B. Edwards, *Theories of Play and Postmodern Fiction* (New York, 1998), p. 12

5 See E. Bruss, 'The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games', *NLH* 9 (1977), 153–72 and R.R. Wilson, 'Three Prolusions: Toward a Game Theory in Literary Theory', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 8 (1981), 79–92 for an overview of this issue, with an emphasis on literary games as reader-response. Peter Hutchinson takes the hardest line on whether authors actively trick and manipulate their readers in *Games Authors Play* (London, 1983). However, Maureen Quilligan echoes what most reception and reading theorists seem to think about this issue: 'the point is not that the author . . . is out merely to trick the reader. To say that the author selects this or that device to create the effect is only a short-hand way of expressing the intentionality of the narrative form itself' in *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, 1979), p. 277. Certainly as Walter Ong observes, 'Readers over the ages have had to learn this game of literacy, how to conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read, or at least how to operate in terms of these projections. They have to know

cludes, 'Play is used in so many ways in the arts, literature, and semiotics, and is made to enter into so many relationships with metaphor, that there is no way these varieties can be contained in one simple ludic category.'[6] Nevertheless, irrespective of form, one important aspect of literary games is their link to cultural memory. So although game/play theory has been far more dominant in the fields of psychology and anthropology than literature, for the purposes of this study those theorists who have focused on the link between game and cultural memory, regardless of discipline, are the most germane.

Cultural and literary critic Johan Huizinga was the first to analyze the ludic by linking culture and game in his systematic study, *Homo Ludens*; his observations continue to serve as the starting point for any ludic analysis of literature.[7] Huizinga argues that a game is both a social 'function' and a social 'construction'; consequently, games cannot be analyzed outside of their social contexts and purposes.[8] According to Huizinga, one of the most significant of those social functions is ethical testing. He suggests that the order and structure of any game invokes ethical testing – after all, playing games is one way of testing ethics without having to literally put those ethics to the test. But such ethical play also produces a memory of its performance; once it is played out and concluded, any game – including a literary one – becomes a cultural product, a 'treasure to be retained by the memory. It is

how to play the game of being a member of an audience that doesn't really "exist". And they have to know how to adjust when the rules change even though no rules thus far have ever been published and even though the changes in the unpublished rules are themselves for the most part only implied', W.J. Ong, S.J., 'The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction', *PMLA* 90 (1975), 9–20, at p. 12.

6 Sutton-Smith, *Ambiguity of Play*, p. 149. Certainly literary game theory is pluralistic rather than one-dimensional, including not only cultural game theory as discussed here, but linguistic play analysis as first advocated by Derrida, as well as the ideas of carnival and the dialogic first considered by Bakhtin. For more on literary game theory, see J.S. Hans, *The Play of the World* (Amherst, 1981); M. Spariosu, *Literature, Mimesis and Play: Essays in Literary Theory* (Philadelphia, 1982) and R.R. Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game and Narrative Theory* (Boston, 1990) as well as J.A.G. Marino, 'An Annotated Bibliography of Play and Literature', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 12 (1985), 306–53.

7 J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*. Huizinga's analysis of play and game was expanded and revised, with a significantly sociological emphasis, by R. Callois in *Man, Play and Games*, trans. M. Barash (New York, 1961). See also the collection of essays on game theory in the special edition of *Yale French Studies* 41(1968), edited by J. Ehrmann; in that volume Ehrmann critiqued both Huizinga's and Callois' conception of the relationship between game and culture as too essentialist in their view of the play-seriousness spectrum, arguing instead that play and culture are the same thing, see 'Homo Ludens Revisited', *Yale French Studies* 41(1968), pp. 31–57. See W. Motte, *Playtexts: Ludics on Contemporary Literature* (Lincoln, 1995), ch. 1, for an overview of all three positions.

8 Huizinga, p. 4.

transmitted, it becomes tradition'.[9] Thus, one of game's social constructions is cultural memory; once played, a game 'assumes fixed form as a cultural phenomenon'.[10] Huizinga concludes that games function first to test individual ethics and, secondly, to provide cultural commemoration of that ethical testing. Accordingly, a literary game is not merely an entertaining diversion, but a cultural exercise, one whose performance retains a significant place in both the individual, and the cultural, memory.

The child psychologist Donald Winnicott has also emphasized that play, culture and memory are connected: 'For me, playing leads on naturally to cultural experience, and indeed forms its foundation.'[11] Winnicott defines culture as the 'inherited tradition', which he sees as 'something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*.'[12] For Winnicott, 'playing and cultural experience are things that we do value in a special way: they link the past, the present, and the future' together.[13] We could conclude that memory only 'works' as a cultural construct if it provides connections, links, to a shared history. While Huizinga suggests cultural memory as the place to keep what we 'find' or discover in the game, Winnicott infers another repository: mythology. Although their definitions differ slightly, both Huizinga and Winnicott see games as producing a cultural product which is collective and, more importantly, commemorative.

Whether observing social play via tribal rites of passage or aesthetic play via theatrical productions, anthropologist Victor Turner emphasizes the 'liminal' and performative aspects of game/play.[14] Turner uses the concept of liminality to define the separate space that Huizinga terms as game-space and Winnicott as play-space, seeing it as a 'complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time, [that] may also include subversive and ludic (or playful) events.'[15] Turner argues that the purpose of liminality is to produce an 'expe-

9 Huizinga, pp. 9–10.

10 Huizinga, pp. 9–10.

11 D.W. Winnicott, p. 106. Winnicott's definition of the play space has striking similarities to Huizinga's definition of a game. The field of child psychology is understandably rich in game and play analysts, beginning with Jean Piaget, in addition to Winnicott, Sutton-Smith and others.

12 Winnicott, p. 99 (emphasis his).

13 Winnicott, p. 109. Note Winnicott's view of 'playing as doing', p. 41, and culture as experiential and how similar this is to Huizinga's conception, and as we will see, to Turner's.

14 Anthropology is the other discipline besides psychology which has most closely examined the role of game and play in culture; see especially Bateson and Geertz in addition to Turner.

15 V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York, 1982), p. 27. For a more detailed analysis of Turner's conception of liminality and its connec-

rience'; such an experience incorporates both a 'journey' or 'test' through which the individual can 'take experimental steps', and also a 'performance', which he defines as an 'act of creative introspection in which "meaning" is ascribed to the events and parts of experience'.[16] This liminal space separates and isolates cultural elements in order to reconfigure them into new and complex forms through performative play – 'in liminality people "play" with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them'.[17] Like Huizinga and Winnicott, Turner also posits cultural meaning as connected to play and memory since he sees cultural meaning as produced, or discovered, via what he terms 'living through', 'thinking back' and 'willing or wishing forward'.[18] In other words, meaning arises in memory since the purpose of liminal play is the discovery of a memory that can in turn 'establish goals and models for future experience'.[19] Again, although terminology differs, all three see games as creating a cultural product which is ethical and memorial. It would seem then that a literary game functions as an ethical and cultural construct which individual authors and readers create, play, and remember.

In the Middle Ages, the repositories for cultural memory included not only mythology, social ritual, or a library of texts, but perhaps most powerfully, an ethically trained (and performative) memory. In the medieval tradition, a trained memory was required not just for didactic purposes, but for ethical ones since memory had a moral, ethical dimension which was connected to all aspects of reading, writing and reception. As Mary Carruthers has demonstrated, the medieval conception of memory differs significantly from the contemporary view of memory and memory training.[20] A well-organized and well-stocked memory 'was not a primitive learning technique' but 'the essential foundation of prudence, *sapientia*, ethical

tions to literature, see M. Spariosu, *The Wreath of the Wild Olive: Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature* (Albany, 1997), esp. ch. 2.

16 Turner, p. 18. Note the similarities to Huizinga's view of game as an ethical test and Winnicott's view of the play space as an area in which the child may experiment.

17 Turner, p. 27. He further argues that 'it is the analysis of culture into factors and their free or "ludic" recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, this is of the essence in liminality', p. 28. Turner also cites Sutton-Smith's definition of such free space as 'anti-structural' space which is used to experience the order–disorder spectrum. Such 'weird recombinations' would seem to be connected to the theory of symbolic inversion in anthropology and to Bakhtin's ideas about carnival and the dialogic in literary theory.

18 Turner, p. 18. Note how similar this is to Winnicott's definition of play as a way to link past, present and future.

19 Turner, p. 18.

20 For example, consider the contemporary assumptions which underlie the concept of rote learning as the 'mere' memorization of facts. See M.J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990) and *The Craft of Tradition: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400–1200* (Cambridge, 1998).

judgment.'[21] It was through the action of reading, and through an interactive use of the memory in connection with that reading, that individual ethics were derived: 'More importantly than growth in knowledge, reading produces growth in character, through provisioning – in *memoria* – the virtue of prudence.'[22] As the text was in some sense 'experienced' and 'performed', the ethical import of that reading merged into one's ethical memory – especially if that memory were properly stocked, trained and utilized. So the experience of reading a text, in this instance a literary one, is an ethical experience or performance; therefore, what one reads and remembers comes to be part of the larger image of reality one inhabits. As Judson Allen notes of the medieval conception of poetry, 'to define ethics in medieval terms is to define poetry, and to define poetry is to define ethics, because medieval ethics was so much under the influence of a literary paideia as to be enacted poetry and poetry was so practically received as to be quite directly the extended examples for real behaviour.'[23] Thus, once read (that is played), literary games become part of individual ethics and collective memory.

The *Legend of Good Women* draws its readers into just such a cultural and literary game: the medieval debate about 'Woman'. By pursuing the intertwined core of literary game and memory, Chaucer is able to consider various aspects of individual reception and cultural memory: how are texts – in this instance debate texts – to be read, and, most importantly, how are they to be remembered? Constructed as a game of reception that draws upon the intertextual awareness of its reader, the rules of the game are established in the *Legend*'s Prologue with the legends themselves constituting the game proper. The medieval debate's cultural legacy is the fundamental issue being played, performed, experienced and ethically tested in the *Legend* as Chaucer considers how the reader is to know which memory to retain in his, or her, memory 'cheste'. With its deliberately paradoxical version of the debate, Chaucer's *Legend* proves to be a literary game where the reader, as the narrator repeatedly directs, is left to determine the ethical wheat from the chaff for him (or her) self.

I

A consideration of the medieval debate about 'Woman' (and the texts which compose the debate) as a literary game leads to a consideration of its role as a cultural, and ethical, construct. As well as functioning as a didactic model throughout the years of its influence, the debate also served as an intellectual

21 Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 176.
22 Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 191.
23 J.B. Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1982), p. 12. See esp. ch. 5 for the relationship between ethics and memory.

game, one which allowed writers to demonstrate their rhetorical skills. As Alcuin Blamires observes:

> There can be little doubt that the intelligentsia did regard the rhetorical formulae of misogyny as a game, or at least that they considered misogyny a suitable arena in which to show off their literary paces. . . . The issue itself (are women for good or for ill?) was not necessarily one meant to excite passionate team support either way, any more than any other topics proposed for literary disputation.[24]

Beatrice Gottlieb agrees that the debate was 'a literary game, a game with a popular subject and one that was capable of turning serious'.[25] Indeed it seems the idea of the medieval debate as literary and rhetorical game was a fairly standard assumption for its writers and its readers. Although contemporary criticism has tended to view the debate as solely misogynistic, usually assuming and implying a purely anti-feminist stance, the medieval debate consistently presented itself as a binary dialogue, encompassing both anti-feminist and pro-feminist positions. Critical acknowledgement that the debate is two-sided is quite recent, with Alcuin Blamires the first to clearly delineate what now seems obvious: the debate's symbiotic nature.[26] So the

[24] A. Blamires, K. Pratt and C.W. Marx, eds., *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 12–13. However, Blamires further warns that 'there was surely too much at stake in this particular debate (apportioning of responsibility for the Fall, for one thing, and women's continuing exclusion from public office for another) for us to dismiss it all as fundamentally unserious', p. 13.

[25] B. Gottlieb, 'The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century', in *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy*, ed. J. Kirschner and S. Wemple (Oxford, 1985), pp. 337–64, at p. 357.

[26] While many scholars are familiar with the misogynist and misogamist traditions, the delineation between the anti-feminist and the pro-feminist traditions has still not been adequately assessed. For instance, R. Howard Bloch observes that 'Above all, I do not want to deny the existence of a myriad galleries of good women stretching from Augustine's portrayal of the martyrs Felicity and Perpetua or Gregory of Nyssa's portrait of his sister, to Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames* or Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', in *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, 1991), p. 10; however, Bloch does not explore the idea that the two sides are interrelated. One of the few early critics to consider both sides is M. Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984), pp. 239–244, where he briefly assesses the debate's role as a literary game. While numerous texts have focused on the misogynistic tradition, the anthology *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* by Blamires, Pratt and Marx, and Blamires' *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford, 1997), are the first to attempt to codify the pro-feminist position, which Blamires terms the 'case for women'. Glenda McLeod's *Virtue and Venom: Catalogues of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, 1991) focuses on the catalogues of female *exempla* in the classical and medieval tradition while Helen Solterer's *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley, 1995) examines the debate in light of the rhetoric of medieval disputation. See also the essays in the recent anthology, *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the*

debate enacts a structural dialectic of blame and praise, either blaming Woman for her inherent evil, defined as her inconstancy, or praising her for her essential goodness, defined as her constancy and stability.[27] Thus, much of the debate focused on female actions and ethical behavior.

This literary and philosophical debate over the definition of Woman's nature, particularly her moral status, served as a standard rhetorical and didactic *topos* throughout the classical, patristic and medieval period and continued as a philosophical question well into the Renaissance. The roots for both pro-feminist and anti-feminist positions are to be found in the classical tradition, particularly Aristotle and Ovid. Aristotle's essentializing definitions of male and female were fundamental to the anti-feminist construct of Woman, both in ancient Greece itself and in the received tradition as it played out in the Middle Ages. Ovid's binary depiction of women, encompassing both 'good' and 'evil', was just as influential to the received tradition of the debate.[28] By the late classical period, patristic authors had further codified the debate's highly polemical nature. Jerome's *Adversus Iovinianum* was perhaps the most influential of all early debate texts – constant reference and invocation of Jerome would become a hallmark of the subsequent debate.[29] In the late classical period, the debate *topos* became a pedagogical tool, with its central question of 'What is a Woman?' incorporated as a traditional com-

Renaissance, ed. T.S. Fenster and C.A. Lees (New York, 2002), especially the introduction by Fenster and Lees, pp. 1–18.

27 For the history of the anti-feminist side of the debate see F.L. Utley, *The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568* (Columbus, 1944; reprinted New York, 1970); K. Rogers, *The Troubled Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle, 1966); V.L. Bullough, 'Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women', *Viator* 4 (1973), 485–501; V.L. Bullough, B. Shelton, and S. Slavin, *The Subordinated Sex: A History of Attitudes Toward Women* (Athens, 1988); P. Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC–AD 1250*, vol. 1 (Montreal, 1985) and *The Concept of Woman: The Early Humanist Revolution 1250–1500*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, 2002); and J. Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge, 1993).

28 Although Ovid himself tends to maintain a satiric and elusive stance in his texts (particularly in the *Amores* with its paradoxical pairing of the *Ars* with their *Remedia*), his ambiguity was not always perceived within the medieval tradition which tended to see him in a more didactic light.

29 Jerome's almost vitriolic depiction of the dangers of both women and marriage would be just as influential as his use of received authorities to bolster his case: 'Thanks to the eye-catching witticisms his treatise incorporated from classical sources, and above all, thanks to the inclusion of a memorably vehement antifeminist passage arguing that the wise man must not marry, which he attributed to Theophrastus, his piece was endlessly quarried by subsequent writers', Blamires, Pratt and Marx, p. 64. Jerome's overwhelming influence on the debate is highly ironic since his diatribe was controversial in its own time; texts such as Augustine's *The Good of Marriage* were written to counter what was seen as Jerome's radical point of view.

ponent of Latin colloquies in both classical and medieval pedagogy. As a result, the topic, and its dialectic format, was a familiar one to any formally educated audience – which could in part account for the debate's popularity.

The debate took on its early medieval form beginning in the twelfth century, with texts from this period establishing remaining rhetorical parameters.[30] Composed in Latin, these debate texts were directed at the clerical readership of the day. As the debate moved into the thirteenth century, its popularity increased and the nature of debate texts themselves broadened as clerical Latinate texts were joined by more vernacular, courtly compositions.[31] The debate proved especially popular in the fourteenth century, which saw multiple texts in circulation that expanded beyond the more clerical focus of earlier writings to include courtly debate poems such as the *dits amoureux* (which addressed questions like 'Who suffers the most in love: the man or the woman?' and 'Who is most loyal: the man or the woman?'), and also the flower and the leaf tradition in which participants were required to choose a side, praising either the flower or the leaf. Linked texts in the praise/blame tradition by the same author, with one text serving as the anti-feminist diatribe and the second text serving as its answering palinode in praise of women, were also at their most popular in the late fourteenth century: Guillaume de Machaut's *Jugement du roy de Behaingne* and *Jugement deu roy de navarre* and Jehan le Fèvre's *Les lamentations de matheolus* and *Le livre de leësce* follow this pattern. Both Machaut and Le Fèvre create metafictional narratives which allow them to use the debate game's intrinsic structures to expand their inquiry beyond the praise or blame of women into the nature of literary authority itself (conventions which Chaucer borrows in the *Legend*). By the end of the fourteenth century, the 'querelle de la *Rose*' also combined praise/blame of women and the nature of literary authority in a highly public rhetorical debate.[32]

Notwithstanding the broad span of the debate, its rhetorical rules and conventions remain fairly consistent throughout; and before any consideration of variations in how the game might be played, it is first necessary to under-

30 Clare Lees and Gillian Overing argue that the debate is not really a factor in Anglo-Saxon texts and culture in 'The Clerics and the Critics: Misogyny and the Social Symbolic in Anglo-Saxon England' in *Gender in Debate*, pp. 19–40.

31 Courtly love's ideals and depictions of women are not considered a part of the pro-feminist side of the formal debate. Blamires makes a clear distinction between what he calls the 'formal' case and the 'incidental' case for women by classifying those texts which provide a less formal defense of women, particularly genres such as hagiography and romance, as incidental. See Blamires, 'Introduction' to *Case for Women*, pp. 1–18.

32 The 'querelle' is often mistaken as the beginning of the medieval debate rather than one of its late medieval forms. See *Le Débat sur la Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris, 1977), and Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, eds, *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents*, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 199 (Chapel Hill, 1978).

stand the rules of the game. In general, the anti-feminist side used four basic polemical models: first, the catalogue of classical *exempla*; second, the catalogue of contemporaneous *exempla*; third, misogamous polemic, based on Jerome; and fourth, first-person complaint. As the debate tradition evolved, these models were increasingly combined and fused into one.[33] In addition to these four polemical models, a standard set of authorities was used to support the anti-feminist position including biblical sources, proverbial statements from the classical and patristic authorities, and catalogues of *exempla*.[34] As the debate continued, early anti-feminist polemic became the 'authority' upon which later anti-feminist polemic was founded; consequently, previous debate texts came to be seen as incontrovertible authorities.[35] As a result, these reiterated texts fashioned a restricted and predetermined hermeneutic circle of authority for proponents of the anti-feminist side.

In opposition, the pro-feminist position derived its three basic polemical models from the 'three tiers of perfection attainable by women': wife, widow and virgin.[36] The pro-feminist side also drew upon a standard set of authorities, including classical *exempla*, *exempla* from the Old and New Testaments, hagiographic *exempla*, and patristic sources that were sympathetic to women.[37] The dialectical structure of the debate also made it obligatory that pro-feminist authors directly address anti-feminist polemic in addition to constructing pro-feminist arguments, with the consequent result that pro-feminist texts invariably cited anti-feminist sources, if only to refute them. An inevitable rhetorical consequence was that the pro-feminist position tended to be based on an almost point-by-point counterargument of its opposition, rather than basing itself on a separate foundation.[38] As well, the

33 Blamires, Pratt and Marx, pp. 10–11. One example of such a fused text, Walter Map's *Letter of Valerius to Ruffinus, Against Marriage*, is a misogamous narrative complaint that warns the reader against marriage by using a mixture of *exempla*, personal narrative and authoritative sources.

34 Blamires, Pratt and Marx, pp. 6–7.

35 Of particular importance for the medieval version of the debate were Ovid, Jerome, and Walter Map, whose inclusion in the manuscript compilations of debate texts was conventional from the twelfth century on. It is just such a manuscript compilation that Jankyn reads in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*.

36 Blamires, Pratt and Marx, p. 13. Terminology for this position is still being debated; see Blamires' discussion in *Case for Women*, pp. 11–12, of the possible terms, including 'feminist', 'profeminist', 'proto-feminist', and 'profeminine'. The choice of terminology is always a difficult one with such a politically and culturally charged topic. Blamires uses 'profeminine' in order to try to avoid such confusion, but as I think the terms 'feminine' and 'feminist' are equally problematic, I will use the terms 'pro-feminist' and 'anti-feminist' within the context of the debate since they seem to best foreground the polemical nature of the two sides.

37 Most important of all was the *exemplum* of the Virgin Mary since her example was seen as overcoming the faults of Eve.

38 For this reason Blamires has defined the relationship between the two sides as 'implicitly symbiotic' with the defense 'being conducted in response to habitual accusations'.

same authorities are cited repetitively throughout the course of the debate, causing earlier pro-feminist texts to become a body of authority invoked by later authors, creating yet another hermeneutic circle analogous to that of the anti-feminist position.

Just how endemic this binary structure was to the debate cannot be disregarded or dismissed. In fact, Alistair Minnis has coined the term 'structural anti-feminism' to highlight the rhetorical conventionality of the debate, arguing that:

> The ideas in question are dictated and required by the structure; the structure itself must change before its characteristic ills disappear. It would be improper to condemn a writer for structural anti-feminism (phobic anti-feminism being, of course, a different matter). If a medieval writer wished to commend the female sex, she or he inevitably engaged in the traditional gender politics.[39]

But it seems that Minnis' definition should be expanded to incorporate a structural pro-feminism as an equally inherent characteristic of the debate, not just rhetorically, but theoretically. As Toril Moi maintains 'there is no pure feminist or female space from which we can speak. All ideas, including feminist ones, are in this sense "contaminated" by patriarchal ideology.'[40] So Moi advocates that critical emphasis should not rest on the origins, but on the effects of the idea: 'The point is not the origin of an idea (no provenance is pure), but the use to which it is put and the effects it can produce.'[41] In this instance, the debate's dichotomous tradition cannot qualify as a pure, untainted feminist discussion, but that certainly does not mean it should be removed from consideration: the pro-feminist interdependence with its opposition does not, and should not, negate its attempts to construct a positive image of 'Woman'.[42] Since the debate consistently demonstrates a fully

Blamires, *Case for Women*, pp. 61–2. However, this kind of reactive, rather than proactive, stance has caused significant uneasiness for many contemporary critics who see accepting the male conceptual foundations rather than attempting new ones as a reductive fallacy; for example, see J. Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes', in *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, ed. J. Kelly (Chicago, 1984), pp. 65–109, at pp. 66–7.

39 Minnis, p. 427. Blamires concurs, concluding that, in a patriarchal culture, it was therefore 'inevitable that . . . many medieval profeminine texts do indeed rehearse a male point of view', *Case for Women*, p. 4.

40 T. Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine', *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. C. Belsey and J. Moore (New York, 1989), pp. 117–32, at p. 118.

41 Moi, p. 118.

42 For instance, see the discussions of female pity in Jill Mann's *Feminizing Chaucer* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 35–8, and Felicity Riddy's 'Engendering Pity in the *Franklin's Tale*', in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, ed. R. Evans and L. Johnson (London,1994), pp. 54–71. Cf. Carolyn Dinshaw,

articulated, if equally rigid, pro-feminist model, it seems essential to acknowledge not just structural anti-feminism, but structural pro-feminism as well.

Certainly both sides of the debate are marked by a rigidity of position and polemic which was not only ingrained, but seemingly static, with the starting point and almost all remaining rhetorical moves predetermined, regardless of position – or gender. Yet, that does not necessarily mean there was no room for modification, transformation, or critique, depending upon an author's purposes. It is our own lack of familiarity with the rules, as well as with any possibilities for play underlying the medieval debate's structure that causes the most critical confusion. This is most evident when we consider one of the debate's primary rhetorical components: the catalogue of *exempla*. As we have seen, the catalogue of female *exempla* serves as a polemical model for both sides of the debate; but what is most problematic for the contemporary reader of the debate is the customary practice for both sides of the debate to use the very same *exempla* to prove their contradictory ends. The reason for this seeming antithesis is that the ethical import lies not in the *exemplum* per se, but in the author's interpretation and adaptation of that *exemplum* to fit the circumstances of the case being made.[43] Again as Moi observes, it is not the origin of an idea, but its praxis that produces significance. Those *exempla* whose contemporary interpretation seems to allow only for anti-feminist interpretation could occupy either position within the medieval debate. Thus stories of women who appear in catalogues as 'good' include figures such as Dido and Medea as well as (seemingly) more conventional choices like Thisbe and Lucrece. Even a figure as seemingly self- evidently 'good' as Lucretia, the paragon of Roman wifely mores, is more problematic than it might seem at first. Her *exemplum* reflects a parallel tradition in which the virtue of the martyred Lucrece in the classical tradition is contrasted to the Augustinian tradition of the vice of her suicide. Accordingly, the interpretive question becomes not whom an author chose as *exempla*, or even why, but instead *how* he uses them. If an *exemplum* can be used either way, then the question becomes how an individual author uses and manipulates that *exemplum* in order to prove his/her side and 'win' the game.

But to tell an *exemplum* so that it 'fits' either side of the debate means that complete recollection is necessarily prohibited, that part of the story must be left out; consequently, both the individual and cultural memory brought into play by the debate are based as much on the ability to selectively forget as

Chaucer's Sexual Poetics (Madison, 1989) and Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, 1992).

[43] For more on the role of exemplification in fourteenth century literature, see J.A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the 'Gawain' Poet* (London, 1971), pp. 78–92.

they are on the ability to remember. If what is read is incorporated into individual memory, individual ethics, and hence, ethical behavior, then playing a literary game by picking and choosing what to remember would have real consequences for the reader. And if that is the case, such performative reading is designed to ethically affect the reader. What is remembered both individually in the mind, and collectively in the literary tradition is the essential component of ethical memory and, eventually, ethical action. By its very nature, playing the debate game, as author or reader, forces one into a consideration of ethical concerns not just about the nature of gender, but about the nature of playing and remembering games: not only what is bad or good, vicious or virtuous, but what to forget and what to remember.

II

Donald Rowe has noted of the *Legend* that 'The fact that it holds little appeal (beyond the charm of the F Prologue) for modern sensibilities, in spite of its problematic character, suggests that the search for a literary and intellectual rationale that will account for it may bring us closer to the medieval Chaucer.'[44] The medieval debate may be one such rationale. The debate was a topic that fascinated Chaucer; its conventions are evident not only in the *Legend*, his only explicit entry in the debate itself, but also in his work both before and after the *Legend*.[45] For Chaucer, literary-rhetorical *topoi* like the debate and its attendant concerns always prove to be complex and contradictory, rather than stereotypically straightforward – consequently, his texts

[44] D. Rowe, *Through Nature to Eternity: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Lincoln, 1988), p. ix. R.F. Green makes a similar observation about late medieval texts in general, 'works which may strike the modern reader as dull (Chaucer's *Melibee*, for instance, or Hoccleve's *Regiment*), or, conversely, qualities which seem to us novel and significant, may have appeared very different to their original audience, and it is only by setting them against a background of contemporary aristocratic preference (as revealed by things such as library collections or account books) that we can put them in their true perspective' in *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1980), p. 12.

[45] A brief list of his works which incorporate the conventions of the debate in some manner makes this clear: *Book of the Duchess*, *Parliament of Fowles*, *House of Fame*, *Troilus and Crisedye*, *Second Nun's Tale*, *Franklin's Tale*, *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*, *Tale of Melibee*, *Clerk's Tale*. In light of this list it is surprising that critical attention has not been directed toward the debate earlier. For the most detailed assessment of the debate's dialectic in the *Legend* see Blamires, *Case for Women*, pp. 151, 212–9. Both Mann, pp. 25–38, and Percival consider the debate although not in the dialectic context posited by Blamires. See also S.H. Rigby, 'The Wife of Bath, Christine de Pizan, and the Medieval Case for Women', *Chaucer Review* 35 (2000), 133–65.

raise more questions than they answer. The initial hermeneutical question for the medieval (as well as the contemporary) reader of the *Legend* would seem to be whether it is a pro-feminist text or an anti-feminist text, but the answer to this question is not the simple one we might wish. While the conventional catalogue of 'good' women, such as those listed in the *Legend*'s Prologue, would seem to indicate Chaucer's polemical stance, in the end, Chaucer conflates both perspectives by presenting anti-feminist satire and pro-feminist defense within one text. Rather than choose one side over the other, Chaucer creates a ludic puzzle designed to test the debate's structural limits, the rules of its game.

In the *Legend*, Chaucer purposefully creates a literary game wherein all positions are to be found – just as the God of Love, Alceste and the narrator co-exist, yet disagree, in its Prologue.[46] To do so the *Legend* depicts a complex dynamic of multiple readers and receptive practices, both good and bad, in its Prologue and tales. The God of Love and Alceste, the allegorical, divine figures who are the instigators of the crisis and punishment in the Prologue, order the Chaucerian narrator to redress what they claim he has misconstrued in his previous works. The God of Love accuses the Chaucerian narrator of anti-feminism despite the narrator's protests that it is his audience – represented ironically enough by the God of Love – who have misinterpreted his text.[47] It is Alceste who provides the 'solution' to this problem: the narrator must rewrite women 'good'. In other words, her solution is purposeful misreading. The narrator, still protesting his innocence and his audience's misreading, is commanded to tell the new, approved stories of 'good' women. But in order to follow Alceste's edict, the narrator must also misread his sources. Finally, each of his tales addresses an implied female audience whom the narrator repeatedly advises on how to mis/read and remember the stories he is relating.[48]

[46] This could explain why analyses that do indeed choose one side over another fail to account for all the ambiguities underlying the text. For example, an extended critical debate in the early part of the twentieth century, between John Livingstone Lowes who argued for the *Legend*'s seriousness against H.C. Goddard's ironic interpretation, set up a two-sided stance that continues to affect critical readings to this day (and ironically mirrors the kind of binary dialectic which Chaucer himself is questioning). See J.L. Lowes, 'Is Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* a Travesty?' *JEGP* 8 (1909), 513–69 and H.C. Goddard, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *JEGP* 7 (1908), 87–129 and 8 (1909), 47–111.

[47] Notably, here the unfavorable reaction to, and protest of, the *Troilus* as anti-feminist is embodied in the male figure of the God of Love, not Alceste or another female audience member as might be expected.

[48] The precise gender make-up of Chaucer's audience is still in question. While R.F. Green argues that there were few if any women in the royal household, see 'Women in Chaucer's Audience', *Chaucer Review* 18 (1983), 146–54, others argue that there was

Thus, the *Legend* asks its readers (inscribed and actual, male and female) to participate in an ambiguous rhetorical game in which the reader is thrown back into individual memory in order to test the dynamics underlying the debate. When the narrator, and in turn, the audience, is repeatedly faced with the choice of whether to believe, or remember, the pro-feminist tradition or the anti-feminist tradition, both prove equally complicated and open to interpretation. Chaucer purposefully problematizes the ways he uses his own sources in the *Legend* in order to highlight how both sides of the debate consistently manipulate and censor their sources. Since the *Legend* is about the very multiplicity of the debate tradition, each of its legends reflects that multiplicity in order to appeal to the reader's memories of those same, often contradictory, literary sources. Robert Edwards similarly concludes about Chaucer's purposes in the *Legend*: 'as Chaucer translates the authors who preserve a culture's memory, he also uncovers what the culture would suppress.'[49] Ultimately it would seem that Chaucer is teaching the praxis of 'good' reading, 'good' memory and thus, 'good' ethics, more than the nature of 'good' women.

That the *Legend* is part of the debate's game is made evident in the Prologue both implicitly and explicitly. The Prologue's multiple allusions to previous debate authorities implicitly mark it as a debate text; Chaucer directly alludes to Ovid's *Heroides*, Jerome's *Adversus Iovinianum* and the *Roman de la Rose* while many more, such as Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, lie just underneath the surface. Like Machaut's and Le Fèvre's paired texts of blame and praise before it, the *Legend* serves as the pro-feminist palinode for the more anti-feminist *Troilus and Criseyde*.[50] Such interlinked texts amplified

in fact an identifiable female audience, see especially N. McDonald, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Ladies at Court and the Female Reader', *Chaucer Review* 35 (2000), 22–42 and C. Sanok, 'Reading Hagiographically: The *Legend of Good Women* and its Feminine Audience', *Exemplaria* 13. (2001), 323–54. See also J. Boffy, 'Women Authors and Women's Literacy in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century England', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150–1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 159–182.

49 R. Edwards, 'Faithful Translations: Love and the Question of Poetry in Chaucer', in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex and Marriage in the Medieval World*, eds R. Edwards and S. Spector (Albany, 1991), pp. 138–53, at p. 153.

50 J.L. Lowes first noted the *Legend*'s connections to Machaut's debate poems in 'Chaucer and the Ovid Moralisé', *PMLA* 33 (1918), 320–5. R. Estrich detailed the parallels between *Navarre* and the *Legend*, in particular noting both texts exhibit the 'feminism motif' in 'Chaucer's *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* and Machaut's *Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre*', *Studies in Philology* 36 (1939) 20–39, especially pp. 30–39, for a detailed comparison of the two texts. Recent scholarship has argued for a reassessment of the importance of Chaucer's debt to Machaut: see J. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and his French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto, 1991); W. Calin, 'Machaut's Legacy: The Chaucerian Inheritance Reconsidered', pp. 29–46, and R.B. Palmer 'The Metafictional Machaut: Reflexivity in the Judgment

the dialectical stance of the debate as the author is forced in the second, companion text to defend himself against accusations that he displayed excessive anti-feminism in the first text. To further reinforce this dialectical quality, authors often invoked legal imagery and language; invariably the author defends himself by claiming that he is only translating his sources and thus is not responsible for the content, a convention invoked by the Chaucerian narrator throughout the *Legend*.

As it is a palinode, the *Legend* begins in the closing stanzas of the *Troilus* when the narrator digresses from his focus on the narrative of Troilus' fate to directly address his audience.[51] This four-stanza digression prefigures the rhetorical nature and intellectual issues of the *Legend*: it will focus on 'good' women; it will be written to appease an inscribed female audience; and it will consider both the problematic nature of the literary tradition and the problematic nature of the transmission of a text and its reception by an audience. The link between the two texts is made explicit when the God of Love formally accuses the *Legend*'s narrator of anti-feminism in the *Troilus*.

The Legend's status as literary game about the debate is made explicit through three direct references to 'game' in its Prologue.[52] In the first reference, the Chaucerian narrator declares that 'there is game noon/ that fro my bokes maketh me to goon' [F33–4; G 33–4], that is except for the games of May, 'Save certeynly, whan that the month of May/ Is comen' [F 36–7; G 36].[53] Although he has stated that he gives full credence, 'so hertely', to books, once he discovers that it is May, the narrator abandons his books and his study for these very May games.[54] In the F version he announces,

Poems', pp. 71–92, in Palmer's *Chaucer's French Contemporaries: The Poetry/Poetics of Self and Tradition* (New York,1999). For Le Fèvre, see R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Jean le Fèvre's *Livre de Leesce*: Praise or Blame of Women?' *Speculum* 69 (1994), 705–25.

51 Critics have often referred to the *Troilus* digression in reference to the *Legend*. For example, Robert Frank notes that 'indeed we have here [V. 1772–85] the theme, the first hint of the device, and much of the tone of the *Legend* established before the *Troilus* had quite finished flowing from his pen', R.W. Frank, Jr., 'The Legend of the *Legend of Good Women*', *Chaucer Review* 1 (1966), 110–33, at p. 118. See also J.A. Burrow's comment on the second stanza in the digression, 'it contains the germ of the whole *Legend of Good Women*', p. 91.

52 I think it is highly significant that these references and their positions are virtually unchanged from the F to the G Prologue. Any differences between the two tend to intensify the game aspect of the debate in the G Prologue. There is, arguably, a fourth game reference. The St Valentine's Day reference and the avian chorus are conventional indicators of the kind of courtly game evoked in the Prologue; see Percival, pp. 308–313. However, this section is severely revised in the G version.

53 All textual citations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L.D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston, 1987).

54 There were many kinds of literal May 'games' played within the royal courts, among them mock trials held to debate questions inspired by the *dits amoureux* and the flower and leaf debate. For more on such courtly games see J. Stevens, *Music and Poetry in*

'Farewel my bok and my devocioun!' [F 39]. That he is leaving his study for the game space is even more explicit in the G version where he declares, 'Farwel my stodye, as lastynge that sesoun!' [G 39]. By abandoning his books, the narrator exchanges his seeming preference for literary authority for that of experiential knowledge – in this instance, the experiential knowledge a game provides. Huizinga argues that game is 'limited' and self-contained since it has its own time and place, its own beginning and end, its own course and meaning – an apt description of most literary texts, but one that is particularly applicable to a dream vision such as the *Legend*. This May game constitutes a game space that is separate from the narrator's 'reality', with differing values and rules and a specific time limit (i.e. 'as lastynge that sesoun'). Participation in this game is voluntary, and its sphere, the dream-world, is both separate from ordinary life and limited in scope. It establishes a separate, 'secret' world for its narrator and its readers that is different from, and other than, the surrounding 'real' world.[55] Even before the Chaucerian narrator has entered into the dream space, he and the reader have entered into a game space.

The notion that the narrator, and hence the reader, is entering into a literary game becomes even more explicit in the two subsequent references to game in the Prologue. The second reference invokes the literary debate game of the flower versus the leaf.[56] First, the narrator ponders how to praise his object of devotion, the daisy. As a poet, his concern involves his ability to properly write of his love for the daisy: 'Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose,/ Suffisant this flour to preyse aright!' [F 66–7; G 59–60]. In order to help him in his 'makyng', he turns to literary authority, to other poets, asking 'helpeth, ye, that hath konnyng and myght' [F 68]. While 'glenyng here and there' [F 75; G 63] among these literary authorities, he invokes first the French marguerite tradition (from which he draws the image of the daisy) and then the flower and leaf tradition.[57] With these allusions, Chaucer calls to

the Early Tudor Court (Cambridge, 1961), especially chs 8–9; R.F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 56–9; and Percival, ch. 15.

55 See Huizinga, pp. 8–11. There is one brief consideration of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in light of Huizinga's ideas about game; see R. Schoeck, 'Chaucer and Huizinga: The Spirit of Homo Ludens', in *Tales Within Tales: Apuleius Through Time*, ed. C. Wright and J. Holloway (New York, 2000), pp. 91–106.

56 For the flower and the leaf debate see G.L. Marsh, 'Sources and Analogues of *The Flower and Leaf*', *MP* 4 (1906–7), 121–67 and 281–326; A. McMillan, ' "Fayre Sisters Al": *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Assembly of Ladies*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1 (1982), 27–42; and *The Floure and the Leafe, The Assembly of Ladies and The Isle of Ladies*, ed. D. Pearsall (Kalamazoo, 1990).

57 For discussion of the marguerite tradition in relation to the *Legend*, see J.L. Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as Related to the French *Marguerite* Poems and the *Filostrato*', *PLMA* 19 (1904), 593–683 and Percival, pp. 23–42.

mind a corpus of texts from the French poetic tradition, particularly those related to the debate.

But there is an interesting difference between the F and G Prologues in this second game reference, one which demonstrates that the revisions to the G Prologue only serve to strengthen the idea of the debate as a game.[58] In F, the narrator at first seems to favor the side of the flower, both in word, 'in service of the flour/ Whom that I serve as I have wit or myghte' [F 82–3], and in deed with his physical worship of the daisy. He declares that his purpose is not just in 'honour of love', but also 'in service of the flour' [F 81–2]. Nevertheless, he rescinds this position only a hundred lines later, stating that in fact he does not favor one side over the other, 'For, as to me, nys lever noon ne lother,/ I nam withholden yit with never nother' [F 191–2]. He concludes that choosing sides does not matter since this work 'is al of another tonne/ Of olde story, er swich stryf was begonne' [F 195–6]; it would seem that his matter, the debate about Woman, comes before the flower and leaf debate since it derives from much earlier sources.

In contrast, in the G Prologue, the initial reference to siding with the flower is gone and now the narrator emphatically declares that he favors neither side. Here he claims he cannot choose sides since 'that nys nothyng the entent of my labour' [G77–8] – rather 'this werk is al of another tonne/ Of olde story, er swich strif was begonne' [G 79–80]. Again, although his topic is related to the flower/leaf debate, the stories he is exploring derive from a much older literary tradition. He elaborates on his 'entent' a few lines later, 'for myn entent is, or I fro yow fare,/ The naked text in English to declare/ Of many a story, or elles of many a geste' [G 85–87]. But the idea of a 'naked text' within such a paradoxical context cannot be the simple, clear statement it seems. And the narrator further problematizes the concept when he adds, 'As autours seyn; leveth hem if yow leste' [G 88]. Now the notion of a 'naked text' is complicated not only by whether to privilege authority or experience, but also by the issue of whether literary authority is to be believed at all. While this nexus of issues is present in both Prologues, the revisions to G tend to make the notion of literary games and their connection to reception and hermeneutics even more explicit.

The third game reference in the Prologue occurs when Alceste explains the narrator's penance. Alceste decrees that 'Chaucer' must write legends of

[58] If G is indeed the revision. The chronology of F before G was established at the beginning of the century (when they were known as the B and A texts respectively) by J.L. Lowes, 'The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* Considered in its Chronological Relations', *PMLA* 20 (1905), 749–864. Critics do continue to raise the issue – for example see Percival, p. 24, n. 2. Certainly, Robert Payne's observation that this has created a conflated reading of the two Prologues is still an astute one, see 'Making His Own Myth: The Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', *Chaucer Review* 9 (1975), 197–211, at p. 198.

'good wymmen, maydenes and wyves' [F 484; G 479] and also tell of the false men who have shamed these women since, as Alceste chastises the narrator, 'For in youre world that is now holde a game' [F 489; G 474]. We have thus moved from the generalized games of May, to the fourteenth-century debate tradition, to, finally, the debate itself. By this point, the debate is indeed a well-established literary game, whether via those debate texts already alluded to through reference to Machaut and Deschamps, or via the kind of debate games played in courtly circles and alluded to at the beginning of the Prologue. It would seem that Alceste is simply making overt for the Chaucerian narrator, and also for the reader, what has been implicit throughout the Prologue: the ludic aspect of the debate.

Once Alceste lays out the rules of the narrator's punishment, she has both established his subject and also dictated his position: his matter is to be the question of 'Woman' and his stance is that of the pro-feminist. The rules of this game, when prescribed by Alceste, are simple and direct: the narrator is to tell the stories of 'good wymenn, maydenes and wyves' [F 484; G 474].[59] In response to Alceste's directive, the Chaucerian narrator sets out to create what seems to be a pro-feminist text, reversing the anti-feminist *topos* of women's inconstancy by transposing it onto the men while the women stand as exemplars of constancy and steadfast virtue. But the actual performance of this directive proves to be not at all as simple (or naked) as Alceste would hope. Instead, as the narrator tells his versions of the women's tales, his references to the anti-feminist tradition continually undercut his supposed pro-feminist vision. The legends themselves prove to be inherently, albeit paradoxically, intertextual, and in the end, interpretation of the game is left to the reader rather than didactically guided by the narrator, or Alceste.

Again, the revisions to the G Prologue work to make such ambiguity even more explicit. The G Prologue lengthens the God of Love's diatribe against the narrator so that he asks the narrator why of his 'sixty bokes, olde and newe' he has not consulted, among others, Jerome and Claudius for stories of good women. On the face of it, this seems contradictory: why consult famously anti-feminist texts for proof of good women? But what is often overlooked in ironic readings of this passage is the double nature of many anti-feminist texts; for example, Jerome, although the source of so much later misogynistic authority, utilizes catalogues of both 'good' and 'bad' women. As Alfred David suggests about the changes to G:

> Chaucer expands the God of Love's speech to include a literary passage (268–307) that heightens the absurdity of Cupid's accusations against Chaucer and makes the authority of books all the more suspect. The God of Love recites a list of books in Chaucer's 'cheste' that presumably tell about

59 As Huizinga notes, 'the rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt', p. 11.

> good women. . . . What the passage shows is that the God of Love, like many critics, does not understand the books he is citing (and by analogy doesn't know or understand the *Roman* and *Troilus*), and that authority can be twisted to serve whatever purpose an author has in mind.[60]

In the end, many of the *Legend*'s tales revolve around this idea that literary authority can be manipulated to whatever purpose is at hand – as the narrator will so ably demonstrate in the legends themselves. What Chaucer ultimately accomplishes in the legends is the evocation of an ambiguous cultural tradition in order to invoke the reader's own memories of the literary sources; the narrator's manipulations are the very essence of this game.

Understandably, it is this emphasis on cultural memory that reveals the other key component woven throughout the Prologue: that literary games are intertwined with literary memory. Just as there is a series of game references in the Prologue, so too is there a series of references to memory, specifically the kind of trained ethical memory so essential to medieval poetics. The initial mnemonic image depicted in the Prologue is the key of remembrance.[61] In the opening lines of the Prologue, books are associated with memory since they hold the key to remembrance. The narrator notes: 'Than mote we [turn] to bokes that we fynde,/ Thurgh whiche that olde thinges ben in mynde' [F 17–18; G17–18]. This image invokes not only books, but also the conventional mnemonic metaphor of the book of the mind.[62] And the more famous lines in this section, 'And yf that olde bokes were aweye,/ Yloren were of remembraunce the keye' [F 25–6; G 25–6] seem to further privilege literary authority. However, this observation by the narrator also overlooks two fundamental rules of medieval rhetoric. First, ethical memory only fails if examples are improperly memorized or utilized. Second, medieval pedagogy teaches that if information is properly memorized, then books serve as references, but they should not be the primary repository of information.[63] This opening mnemonic image serves to remind the medieval reader of the very nature of ethical memory practice.

The next mnemonic image is the daisy, which here memorializes female

60 A. David, *The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry* (Bloomington, 1976), p. 50.

61 Payne was the first to draw extensive attention to this phrase and topos in *The Key of Remembrance: A Study of Chaucer's Poetics* (New Haven, 1963).

62 The book of the mind, like the chest, is yet another metaphor for trained memory. Literary metaphors for such mnemonic devices are commonplace in medieval texts and include images of a storehouse or *thesaurus*; a book of memory which can be read page by page in the mind; buildings; libraries; storerooms or cellars; birds; bees; meadows; pearls; a money pouch or *sacculus*; a cave or inner room; and a chest or *arca*. See ch. 1 of Carruther's *Book of Memory* for a detailed discussion of these metaphors.

63 In fact, rhetorical authorities argued that reliance on books would cause a weakening of intelligence and ethics on the part of the individual.

constancy, the central theme of the narrator's tales. Florence Percival notes that the 'inspirational marguerite of French poetry is very strongly associated with memory as well as faithfulness', and adds that the daisy serves as a 'kind of natural mnemonic, which should bring to mind and preserve all that is known of the faithfulness, the goodness, of women, as it is recorded in old books, seen in the visions of poets, and known from personal experience.'[64] In fact, Chaucer pointedly refers to the daisy's role as a mnemonic device when the narrator recalls that the daisy was created in remembrance of Alceste: 'In remembrance of hire and in honour/ Cibella maade the daysye' [F 530–1; G 518–9]. The Prologue's *balade*, which follows the image of the daisy, serves a mnemonic function as well. If the daisy commemorates female constancy as embodied by Alceste, then the list of 'good' women to be found in the ballad celebrates and commemorates even more examples of such constant, good women. Robert Frank makes a particularly astute observation about the reader's experience of the *Legend* when he suggests that 'For every name on the first list [the *Balade*] there is a story which even in fragmentary form flashes across the memory and illuminates the name. . . . When we hear them [names, stories] we acquire a dimension beyond our mortality. We are linked with others who have heard the story in the past and we share a human history.'[65] Both the daisy and the *balade* remind us of the specific literary moments and contexts that these women embody – exactly the kind of memorable moments readers should have stored in their ethically trained memory.

The final mnemonic image in the Prologue, one we have already seen, the narrator's 'cheste', is the most significant. Throughout the Prologue the reader has been reminded of the key of remembrance and of the *exempla* to be remembered; but this final reference is to the specific nature of the narrator's individual memory. The *topos* of individual memory as a treasure chest or a storage house is a prominent one in medieval rhetoric; such a chest is not just a physical object containing books, but a mental construct, a storage house, for the knowledge that comes from books.[66] When the narrator

64 Percival, pp. 52–3.

65 R.W. Frank, Jr., 'The *Legend of Good Women*: Some Implications', in *Chaucer at Albany*, ed. Russell Hope Robbins (New York, 1975), 63–76, p. 72. Note how similar this is to Winnicott's description of the development of culture. Frank further observes of the *Legend*'s stories that 'Story has another element as well. It is a remembered action. It is an action, an event sufficiently out of the ordinary to make it memorable, remembered, and so repeated', p. 74. This is also quite similar to Huizinga's assessment of literature as experiential and commemorative.

66 See Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, pp. 33–45, especially pp. 42–5. In his *Confessions*, Augustine alludes to the 'treasure house' of memory which his mind can access: '*Ubi sunt thesauri innumerabilium imaginum*', in St Augustine, *Confessiones*, trans. W. Watts, corrected W.H.D. Rouse, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, 1960–1), X: 8.

expresses his ignorance of Alceste's identity and name, the God of Love responds that, in fact, he already has the knowledge: 'And that thow knowest wel, pardee/ If yt be so that thou avise the./ Hastow nat in a book, lyth in thy cheste' [F 508–10; G 496–8]. Here, the God of Love is not necessarily pointing to a physical book or library, but is rather pointedly explaining that the narrator already knows Alceste's story – he just has to recall it from his ethical memory. In other words, the God of Love is reminding the narrator to use his key of remembrance. Once the narrator hears the name, he is supposed to remember not just the story, but also its significance. Again, the G Prologue intensifies this image by adding yet another reference to the narrator's mental store when the God of Love asks the narrator, 'Was there no good matere in thy mynde,/ Ne in alle thy bokes coudest thow nat fynde/ Som story of wemen that were goode and trewe?' (G 270–2). The distinction between information found within the books themselves, 'alle thy bokes', and the store of information found in the 'mynde' through the key of remembrance is clearly drawn here.

Chaucer plays upon this idea of individual and cultural memory throughout the legends themselves both for the heroines and for the reader.[67] Cleopatra laments that Antony was 'nere out of myn herte's remembraunce' [686]. In the 'Legend of Lucrece', the narrator states that he tells her story to 'preyse and drawe to memorye' [1685] and in the 'Legend of Ariadne' he declares, 'Write I this storye,/ But for to clepe ageyn unto memorie' [1889]. Thus, the women's laments, the narrator's invocations, all link us back to the opening lines of the Prologue. What Chaucer demonstrates throughout the *Legend* is that not only do books hold the key to memory, but the experience of reading, or of playing, a literary game can also be written into memory.

III

The first legend, that of Cleopatra, sets the pattern for the tales that follow. It is useful to analyze Cleopatra's tale by looking at how Chaucer establishes a paradigm in this first legend – the rules of his game – to train the audience's reading and expectations. Although it seems at first as if the tale will conform to a conventional courtly romance, its ethical focus and import prove to be the constancy of the wife, Cleopatra, in stark opposition to her

[67] H. Phillips has suggested, 'One could see what interest this would have for Chaucer, devising the *Legend of Good Women* as a work devoted to the problem of how the written record preserves (and interprets – faithfully or unfairly) a memory of women's experiences of faith and suffering in love', in 'Literary Allusion in Chaucer's Ballade: "Hyd, Absalon, Thy Gilte Tresses Clere" ', *Chaucer Review* 30 (1995), 134–49, at p. 141.

husband Antony's instability and faithlessness. Doubt is raised about Antony's stability from the beginning, when the reader is almost immediately informed that Antony has abandoned his first wife, Caesar's sister, 'falsly, or that she was war,/ And wolde algates han another wyf' [593–4]. The narrator quickly steps in to assure that 'Natheles, for sothe, this ilke senatour/ Was a ful worthy gentil werreyour' [596–7]. Yet the ambiguity is already established in the mind of the reader. Only ten lines later, the narrator declares, 'As certeynly, but if that bokes lye,/ He was, of persone and of gentillesse' [609–10]. Since the context of the Prologue has already raised the question of the stability of literary authority, the certainty of Antony's depiction grows increasingly unstable. Antony is depicted both as a soldier and a leader, but also as a narcissistic, courtly lover: 'love hadde brought this man in swich a rage/ And hym so narwe bounden in his las . . . Hym thoughte there nas nothyng to hym so due/ As Cleopatras for to love and serve' [599–604]. Even in his death, Antony is depicted as thinking of himself first, rather than his wife. He is the first to flee the failed sea battle, leaving Cleopatra behind; she is left to fend for herself, just like his first wife, since Cleopatra 'coude of Cesar have no grace' [663]. His final words before his suicide – ' "Allas", quod he, "the day that I was born!" ' [F 658] – focus again on himself, rather than his beloved. The narrator's summation of Antony, 'Ye men that falsly sweren many an oth/ That ye wol deye if that youre love be wroth,/ Here may ye sen of wemen which a trouthe!' [666–9] makes clear Antony's disloyalty to his wife.

Instead, it is Cleopatra, who, by repeatedly alluding to their contract and her constancy to that promise, stands in marked contrast to Antony's instability. Cleopatra's final lament reveals not only her sorrow, but her motivation for her constancy – part of which is related to memory as she declares that, 'Ye nere out of myn herte's remembraunce' [686]. It would seem that Cleopatra formed this covenant as part of her ethical memory. She reveals, 'in myself this covenaunt made I tho' [688]; this is her version of their contract, created in her ethical memory. Because she is Antony's wife, she believes that she has agreed to experience all that her husband does for 'wel or wo, for carole or for daunce . . . That ryght swich as ye felten, wel or wo . . . The same wolde I fele, lyf or deth' [687– 692]. She concludes, 'thilke covenant whil me lasteth breth/ I wol fulfille' [693–4]. And she will follow this ethical stance to its logical conclusion, her own death – as will the other women in the legends – in order to fulfill her constant promise to be 'Unreprovable unto my wyfhood ay' [691].

There is a distinctly mnemonic aspect to Cleopatra's tale. As part of the final remembrance of this story, the reader is left with a visceral mental image of the naked Cleopatra jumping into a pit filled with vipers. The pit lies next to the elaborate, and elaborately described, shrine that Cleopatra built to house Antony's body. Cleopatra herself concludes of this final resting place, 'and that shal ben wel sene,/ Was nevere unto hire love a trewer

quene' [694–5]. As V.A. Kolve has also suggested of the mix of memory and image in this tale, 'Chaucer discovered within the Cleopatra tradition certain materials that could be made to address a truth more generalized than the particulars of chronicle or legend, and he worked them into a memorial center of meaning and meditative suggestion for the entire poem.'[68] The concluding lines of the tale, with the narrator lamenting his inability to find any man who is similarly 'trewe and stable' [703], seems to reinforce the memory of female constancy to be associated with this tale.

But while this first legend follows the rules of the game the most strictly, as the legends proceed the depiction of the women seems ever more problematic. It is the following tales that make the dichotomy inherent in the debate tradition both more prominent and more paradoxical; what makes this game so ambiguous (and some would say irritating) is that the narrator seems to play the role of 'spoilsport', introducing doubt and ambiguity even as he ostensibly follows the rules.[69] Though the portrait of Cleopatra seems straightforward, any reader with prior knowledge would know that Cleopatra was not always the 'good' woman depicted here. And this 'spoiling' continues throughout the remaining tales.

As he similarly does in most of the legends – particularly Dido and Medea – the Chaucerian narrator invokes the parallel traditions underlying the *exemplum* of Lucrece. Although he first claims to be following Livy and Ovid's version of the chaste Roman matron in order to 'drawe to memory/ The verray wif, the verray trewe Lucresse', the narrator immediately alludes to the version of the 'grete Austyn' [1685–90], the one which chides her for the vice of her suicide. So, after invoking the reader to 'draw to memorye' [1685] this tale, the narrator then deliberately invokes its contradictory authorities before embarking upon his narration. Consequently, the reader is engaged in a hermeneutical conflict throughout. As Kathryn Lynch has also suggested of this dichotomy:

> Thus a poet who is himself in the midst of composing a poem that is itself a game in praise of women clarifies the moral corruption that such games risk . . . he counterpoises the Augustinian Lucretia to Lucretia the protomartyr, to demonstrate how the second requires reconsideration of the first.

[68] V.A. Kolve, 'From Cleopatra to Alceste: An Iconographic Study of The *Legend of Good Women*', in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry*, ed. J.P. Hermann and J.J. Burke, Jr. (University, AL, 1981), pp. 130–78, at p. 132). Cf. Beverly Taylor, 'The Medieval Cleopatra: The Classical and Medieval Tradition of Chaucer's *Legend of Cleopatra*', in *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1979), 249–69, for an ironic interpretation of this tale.

[69] Huizinga draws a vital distinction between the spoilsport and the cheat. The cheat is more easily tolerated than the spoilsport as it is the latter who breaks the 'magic circle' of the game and reveals 'the relativity and fragility of the play world', pp. 11–12.

> But there is more. The [vicious rhetorical] circle closes when we remember that the first (the Augustinian Lucretia) also compelled reconsideration of the second (the proto-martyr).[70]

Although this version of Lucrece's story is ostensibly pro-feminist, the reader is led to hold both versions in mind throughout the telling of the tale. The final emphasis of the tale, despite Lucrece's tragic end, is her stability: the narrator concludes that 'for she was of love so trewe,/ Ne in her wille she chaunged for no newe;/ And for the stable herte, sadde and kynde,/ That in these wymmen men may alday fynde' [1874–7]. Like Cleopatra before her (and all the other women in the *Legend*), Lucrece is paradoxically destroyed by the very constancy to which she was so loyal.

What Chaucer demonstrates is that given such a restricting and confining definition, in the end there is only one way for the story to play out. The movement of the tales in the *Legend* demonstrates the entropy and stasis engendered by the stereotypical dichotomies of the debate alongside an exaggeration of the paradoxes underlying these *exempla*. Although many contemporary critics have taken a negative view of the women's passivity, what Chaucer really depicts here is a paradoxical ideal: active passivity – or, in other words, an active constancy.[71] As virtue lies in constancy, these women's role is to remain stable in, and loyal, to their constancy. However, Chaucer is not just criticizing the debate's rigid parameters, he is creating a space which demonstrates the veritable impossibility of such rigidity. As Minnis observes, Chaucer places 'exemplary womanliness on a site which accommodates both earnest and game, and provokes the thought that literary play can have serious cultural implications.'[72] After all, in the end all the women who play the game 'good' wind up dead, abandoned, and/or deserted.[73]

IV

But rather than being deserted or abandoned, the readers of the *Legend* are forced into a pro-active stance by Chaucer's multi-layered rhetorical displacement; they (we) must accept responsibility for their own hermeneutical

70 K. Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 134. While acknowledging the *Legend* as a form of courtly game, Lynch focuses on the metaphysical liar's paradox and its connection to the *Legend* rather than the game itself.

71 For example, C. Dinshaw argues that 'As the heroines lose their individuality in the series of legends, they come to seem increasingly passive, until we reach the final image in the series: Hypermnestra, in flight from her father, finally just *sits down* in abandonment and defeat', p. 75 (emphasis hers).

72 Minnis, p. 68.

73 A position which some critics have argued the reader also embodies, see Peter Allen, 'Reading Chaucer's Good Women', *Chaucer Review* 21 (1987), 419–34.

authority. The narrator's initial 'defense' against the charges of anti-feminism leveled against him in the Prologue is displacement: he is a mere translator and cannot be held responsible for that which he translates. Certainly, his allusions to the reader's individual memory, as well as to the cultural memory of his sources, act to further displace his own responsibility for that which he 'translates'. His repeated comments, asides and suggestions to the reader work to reinforce the reader's active response to the text. By questioning the very authority of literary sources, he further displaces authority onto the reader, increasing individual responsibility for an ethical reception practice. Finally, such comments as 'And trusteth, as in love, no man but me' (2561) are so problematic within this context that they invoke the idea of game, play and paradox rather than that of literal interpretation.

As the *Legend* is a game, then it may also deliberately be a game with no ending, forcing the reader into an even more active hermeneutical participation. The *Legend* itself ends before Hypermnestra's tale is over, with the line 'This tale is seyd for this conclusioun' [2723], but with no actual conclusion to resolve the dichotomies within the text.[74] Although often seen as a signal for Chaucer's boredom with the work, as Phillips and Havely observe of this problematic conclusion, 'Rather than being abandoned because it was too boring, the *Legend* may have proved too complex and paradoxical, too full of tensions.'[75] The *Legend* is, indeed, full of such tensions. But rather than signaling artistic failure, these tensions signal the kind of ethical testing and performance which a literary game engenders. Like other dream visions, the *Legend* is a metadidactic reflection; driven as much by process as by product, the ethical results of reading such texts are always variable, dependent upon each reader's experience.[76] That is ultimately the purpose of literary games (and dream visions): to create liminal spaces in which complex ideas can be enacted, explored and tested.

Thus, the legends play out the debate's strictures in such a way as to encourage deliberation – the very thing for which game theory argues such spaces are created. By displacing hermeneutic responsibility onto the reader, as Minnis argues, 'these case histories could have encouraged men and women alike to push at the hierarchical limits of what was possible, thus providing a site for actual dissent'.[77] While *the Legend* does not invoke actual dissent, it does promote the game of dissension. Chaucer's purpose is to

74 I would argue that Chaucer intended Hypermnestra's tale to be the final one in the collection regardless of how many total tales were projected in the final version.

75 H. Phillips and N. Havely, eds, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry* (London, 1997), p. 298.

76 See T. Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia, 1990) and C. Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic and the Poetics of Didacticism* (Stanford, 1998) for more detailed discussions of the hermeneutical experience engendered by dialectical texts.

77 Minnis, p. 451.

force readers to 'respond to his appeal and participate in the dialogue his poetry wants to provoke'.[78] Once played, the game of the *Legend* leaves its readers with a series of questions: When confronted by such contradictory traditions as those found in the *Legend*'s tales, which version of these stories should be ethically remembered? Which *exempla* should be preserved in one's ethical memory in order to construct the right kind of ethical character? How should the reader play, and remember, the game 'good'?

If, as game theory contends, playing a game has ethical and memorial consequences and, as medieval rhetoric deems, both reception practice and the memory of that reception practice are ethical endeavors, then a medieval literary game would be one which created ethical implications for individuals as they read, or 'played', the game. The *Legend* is able to ethically test the static nature of the structural dichotomy underlying the debate, not by privileging either side, but rather by playing out both sides for the reader's own assessment: 'Finally the choice among competing points of view – or the decision not to choose and to accept them all – is the audience's own.'[79] It would seem that for Chaucer reading and playing a literary game makes it difficult to remember simplistically and stereotypically. So the *Legend* is a game about the debate, but even more so a game about the ethical issues inherent in playing a literary game. Playing the *Legend* demonstrates that any ideals of the 'good' ultimately lie in the ethical experience and memory of the reader, rather than in the moral of a given *exemplum*, or in the rigid rules of the game. As Turner suggests, ' "rules" may frame a performance, but the "flow" of action and interaction within the frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meaning which may be incorporated into subsequent performances.'[80] From this perspective, remembrance truly is the key to playing the game.

78 D. Mehl, 'The Audience of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies: In Honour of Russell Hope Robbins*, ed. B. Rowland (Bowling Green, 1974), pp. 173–189, at p. 187.

79 P. Strohm, 'Chaucer's Audience', *Literature and History* 5 (1977), 26–41, at p. 38.

80 Turner, p. 79.

6

Intention, Integrity and 'Renoun': The Public Virtue of Chaucer's Good Women

SIMON MEECHAM-JONES

Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* is a meditation on the meaning of integrity[1] – the integrity of female virtue in deed and intention, and the integrity of the written word which preserves the memory of that virtue, at the cost of interpreting and judging its exemplars. Through the textual balancing of the Prologue, in a palmate structure, with the narratives that follow, Chaucer is able to imply a parallel between the ethical difficulties to be surmounted in any celebration of feminine virtue and the imperfect ways in which narrative represents the qualities of living and once-living women.

Both in form and in its meditation on the difficult expression of feminine heroism in Classical and medieval society, the *Legend of Good Women* is an experimental work, and an experiment not always judged to have been accomplished successfully. It is ironic that so many critics have believed themselves traduced by a text which depicts the misleading fictions of 'false men that hem bytraien' (LGW F 486).[2] Yet a text which might seem to justify Arnold's charge that Chaucer 'lacks the high seriousness of the great classics'[3] proves, on the contrary, how fastidious and acute was Chaucer's reading of the morality of his sources. In the *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer draws together and re-animates the experiences of a gallery of feminine archetypes suffering the pains of the denial of satisfaction – as a means of demonstrating how deceiving are the promises of literary narrative to offer satisfaction to the reader. In its constant undercutting of the ethical certainties which these narratives were believed to demonstrate, Chaucer's *Legend* struggles to escape becoming complicit in the moral obfuscations inevitable

1 The word *integrity* is listed by *MED* as a fifteenth-century coinage. Chaucer's difficulties in adumbrating the moral qualities of his fictional heroines were perhaps increased by the absence of a term which could serve to represent the judgements in which he was engaged.

2 All quotations from Chaucer's works are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford, 1988).

3 Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, 2nd series (London, 1888).

in the perpetuation through narrative precedent of exemplars drawn from the ethical and cultural priorities and prejudices of the past.

Having imagined the questioning by Cupid in the Prologue of his own integrity as a poet, Chaucer draws an extended parallel between the difficulties of sustaining the promise of good faith in literary composition and in 'the crafte of fyn lovynge', a parallel which illuminates the gap in understanding between the male and female lovers in the legends which follow. In Cupid's charge-list against the poet, Chaucer stands accused of treachery,

> And thow my foo, and al my folk werreyest,
> And of myn olde servauntes thow mysseyest
> And hynderest hem with thy translacioun (LGW F 322–4)

where Alceste diagnoses imperfect performance:

> And eke, peraunter, for this man ys nyce,
> He myghte doon yt, gessyng no malice,
> But for he useth thynges for to make;
> Hym rekketh noght of what matere he take. (LGW F 362–5)

In each of the legends that follow, the reader must judge where the truth lies between bad faith and poor performance – that is, whether it is through a failure of self-understanding, or through the concealing guile made available through narrative that, in making their case to posterity, Cupid's saints seem to 'rekketh noght of what matere' (LGW F 365) they take. In the eyes of Cupid and Alceste, the life-patterns of these diverse women are congruous with a recurring archetype, but in fact their experiences of love and lovers vary greatly, and we can expect that Chaucer's audiences would have been more keenly aware of the incongruity of the company of ladies Chaucer had assembled.[4] Though the *Legend* has been criticised as repetitive in its structure, its meaning was designed to be revealed through the recognition of difference, as Chaucer demonstrated the misunderstandings and self-deceptions inevitable when 'truth' – that is, fidelity in love – is believed to be identical to the meaning of 'truth' in the eyes of God.

[4] For Dido, Ariadne, Hypsipyle and Phyllis, their lovers' fault lies not in having loved them insufficiently, but in withdrawing themselves from that love, bringing to an (untimely) end their expression of love. It is not intention but chance which separates Pyramus and Thisbe, causing Thisbe to take her own life as a means of proving, 'But God forbede but a woman can/ Ben as trewe in lovynge as a man!' (LGW F 910–11). At the same time Thisbe stakes a claim, almost of ownership, over the afterlife of her hasty lover: 'Thow shalt no more departe now fro me/ Than fro the deth, for I wol go with thee' (LGW F 898–9). Cleopatra, too, can scarcely claim to have been betrayed, except by her lover's failure as a general and his decision to take his own life after she had fled the scene of battle. In this company, it is strange to find the story of Philomel, never loved by Tereus but merely lusted after.

In the opening lines of the F Prologue, Chaucer introduces the two themes which determine the distinctive moral texture of the Legend:

> A thousand tymes have I herd man telle
> That ther ys joy in hevene and peyne in helle,
> And I acorde wel that it ys so;
> But, natheles, yet wot I wel also
> That ther nis noon dwellyng in this contree
> That eyther hath in hevene or helle ybe,
> Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen
> But as he hath herd seyd or founde it writen;
> For by assay ther may no man it preve.
> But God forbede but men shulde leve
> Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!
> Men shal not wenen every thing a lye
> But yf himself yt seeth or elles dooth;
> For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth,
> Thogh every wight ne may it nat ysee. (LGW F 1–14)

In a statement unusual in its directness from a poet generally so guarded in explaining his purposes, and, by comparison with his contemporary Gower (or his successors Lydgate and Hoccleve), so unideological and undidactic in his expression of religious or social engagement, Chaucer raises at the outset the difficulty of recognising the true nature of virtue, and the contradictory roles of literature in mediating attempts to understand virtuous conduct. There is a powerful irony in the placing of the interjection 'God wot' into the line 'For, God wot, thing is never the lasse sooth', since God himself must be the ultimate expression of that truth which 'every wight ne may it nat ysee' but to which s/he must aspire. *MED* notes the increasing absorption of the word *sooth* into religious discourse in the later Middle Ages, often as an epithet applied to God, to signify 'partaking both of human and of divine nature, true man and true god'. Insofar as Chaucer's Ladies are mortal, but made in the image of God, Chaucer recalls, in the opening of his poem, the standard against which the actions and intentions of Cupid's saints must be judged. It is significant that, to emphasise the importance of this moment, Chaucer then denies himself the use of the word through the rest of the poem, thereby drawing out the distance between 'sooth' and the 'trewth' pledged by inconstant men.

Chaucer's determination to assert the provisionality of literary judgement is shown to result from his unease at what he had 'founde . . . writen'. In its concern with the ethical consequences of the creation of texts, the *Legend* belongs with the *House of Fame* as the product of Chaucer's rejection of Dante's assertion of the power and fitness of literature to pass judgement not merely on the personalities and events of his own time, but also on actions and intentions the poet knows of only through the witnesses of textual

record. Certainly, the lines, 'That ther nis noon dwellyng in this contree/ That eyther hath in hevene or helle ybe' (LGW F 5–6) seem designed as a rebuke to the sublime self-confidence of Dante's aesthetic, in which poetry claims for itself the power (and the wisdom) to determine the allotted place within God's judgement of both the subjects of poetic narrative and, in the figures of Virgil, Sordello and Brunetto Latini, the creators of poetry themselves. The happy chance of Alceste's recollection of a maxim from the works of Dante allows Chaucer, with an apparently guileless sharpness, to cite the Italian poet's name as an expert witness on the dangers of bad faith:

> Envie ys lavendere of the court alway,
> For she ne parteth, neither nyght ne day,
> Out of the hous of Cesar; thus seith Dante (LGW F 358–60)

Out of his own mouth, Dante's words question the assurance of objectivity, of ethical disinterestedness, upon which readers must depend if they are to accept the morality of Dante's judgement of the living and the dead. Though Chaucer clearly finds Dante's claim to ethical certainty disturbing, his unease is expressed covertly, through the questioning of Dante's method, which animates the *House of Fame* and the *Legend of Good Women*. The tableau of Love's rebuke in the Prologue, in proposing the *Legend* as a corrective to Chaucer's betrayal of the veneration of love in writing *Troilus and Criseyde*, seeks to deflect the reader's attention from the fact that design of the *Legend* shows far greater structural and thematic influence from the *Commedia* than from Chaucer's previous poem. Critics and readers alike have regretted the 'unsatisfying' length of many of the legends – clearly too long to be passing allusions but perceived to be insufficient to stand as discrete narratives.[5] Such judgements are perhaps increased by the editorial presentation of each legend as if a complete 'whole' – a presentation which may well be post-Chaucerian. In its relatively swift presentation of a selection of grand *Scene* from Classical sources, the *Legend* can seem like a sampler plate of Classical narrative, designed to titillate the appetite but not to feed the reader's hunger for narrative. Though Frank was correct in his valuation of the *Legend* as an important witness of literary transition, it is much harder to understand his judgement of the *Legend* as marking out a new commitment to the narrative mode:

> The apparent return to the vision in the Prologue to the *Legend* is a self-conscious, possibly mocking resumption of the form. More important is the fact that the narratives that make up the body of the work are presented outside the frame and outside the sanction of the dream form.

5 Criticism of the *Legend* along these lines is summarised in William A. Quinn, *Chaucer's Dream Visions and Shorter Poems* (New York, 1999), p. 300.

> In abandoning this form [the dream-vision], Chaucer is doing something more than jettisoning a device. He is moving into a new kind of poetry, the narrative mode, and away from the lyric-narrative and discursive-narrative modes of his vision poems.[6]

Rather, Frank misrepresents Chaucer's purpose in the *Legend*, which is not to accumulate narrative but to display the patterns revealed by the interrogation of narrative structures.[7]

Modern readings of the poem have been further complicated by expectations formed through an experience of the more discrete and individuated pilgrims' stories in the *Canterbury Tales*. Unlike some of the *Canterbury Tales*, most notably the 'Canon Yeoman's Tale', the narratives which constitute *The Legend of Good Women* are, by design, insufficient to stand alone as separate texts, removable from their framing matrix, but must derive their meaning predominantly, or only, from their role within a larger structure. In this, they recall the narratives embedded within the *Commedia* as the spirits of the dead explain the actions that led to their eternal fate. But the medium of self-presentation proves very different. Dante's re-animated spirits express their own past through Dante's judgement of them, presenting us with a sequence of witness-statements, as the dead confess their failings. Chaucer's purpose in the *Legend of Good Women* is quite opposite, using the unreliability of narrative testimony to construct an anti-*Commedia* which seeks to demonstrate both the impossibility of determining what God's judgement would be, and literature's unsuitability to make such determinations. Perhaps also in his thoughts was Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, another work in which, albeit more playfully, a range of Classical and other stories is retold to exemplify aspects of sin, in this case the Seven Deadly Sins of Lovers. Where, for Dante (and, perhaps more problematically, for Gower) literature functions as the recording tablet of ethical history, for Chaucer, literature's crucial role in the perpetuation of record is merely the place at which the process of moral judgement can begin, 'And yf that olde bokes were aweye,/ Yloren were of remembraunce the keye' (LGW F 25–6).

In the phrase 'of remembraunce the keye' Chaucer demonstrates the distance between the undelineated imaginative space that constitutes 'remembraunce', and literary culture, which is instrumental in its recovery but can never become fused or co-terminous with its subject. In the *House of Fame*, Chaucer had demonstrated his powerful awareness of the inevitability

6 Robert W. Frank, Jr., *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), p. 4.

7 Lisa Kiser offers a similar reading, but argues that the execution of the poem and in particular the 'thickly ironic texture and its broad comedy conceal Chaucer's intentions': Lisa J. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Ithaca, 1983).

of the indiscriminate and incomplete quality of literary record, figured in the image of the 'roche of yse' on which the Court of Fame rests:

> Tho sawgh I al the half ygrave
> With famous folkes names fele,
> That had iben in mochel wele,
> And her fames wide yblowe.
> But wel unnethes koude I knowe
> Any lettres for to rede
> Hir names by; for, out of drede,
> They were almost ofthowed so
> That of the lettres oon or two
> Was molte away of every name,
> So unfamous was woxe hir fame.
> But men seyn, 'What may ever laste?'
> Thoo gan I in myn herte caste
> That they were molte awey with hete,
> And not awey with stormes bete.
> For on that other syde I say
> Of this hil, that northward lay,
> How hit was writen ful of names
> Of folkes that hadden grete fames
> Of olde tyme, and yet they were
> As fressh as men had writen hem here
> The selve day ryght, or that houre
> That I upon hem gan to poure. (HF 1136–58)

Some reputations are preserved – 'with the shade/ Of a castel that stood on high' (HF 1160–61) – while others, denied the chance advocacy of a Dante or an Ovid, are defaced by obliterating Time. Even before the intervention of the distortions of authorial intention, perpetuation through literary record is shown to be partial in every sense of that word.

This notion of chance, or the absence of justice, which so characterises the *House of Fame* is reformulated in the *Legend of Good Women*. In the line, 'For by assay ther may no man it preve', Chaucer begins to reveal an alternative ground for his rejection of literature as a means of judging virtue. *MED* lists 'assay' both as a scientific test for the quality of metal and, used metaphorically, as 'a testing of character or personal truth'. It is used in this metaphorical sense by Gower, in the *Confessio Amantis*:

> Bot whan it [man's fidelity] comth unto thassay
> Thei finde it fals an other day:[8]

[8] *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 2 vols, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford 1900–1). *Confessio Amantis*, V 3239–40. There is clearly an association between the uses of the image in the *Confessio* and Chaucer's use of the word. These lines introduce Gower's account of the story of Jason and Medea.

> So mai we knowe bothe tuo
> Unwarli what oure wyves do,
> And that schal be a trewe assay.[9]

Chaucer himself returns to the image in the Prologue to the 'Wife of Bath's Tale', a tale which both revisits and parodies the central concerns of the *Legend*:

> Thou seiest that oxen, asses, hors and houndes,
> They been assayed at diverse stoundes
> . . .
> But folk of wyves maken noon assay,
> Til they be wedded . . . (CT III 285–6, 290–91)

The 'assay' made of oxen may be of some measurable quality or benefit, but that made of 'wyves' tests only the subjective expectations of the husband. The 'assay' of virtue which Dante presents as a standard of truth can also be formulated only metaphorically – except by the divine judgement of God which *is* 'sooth'. The *Commedia* asserts, but Chaucer's *Legend* denies, that poetry written through human consciousness can ever achieve this 'sooth', written, as any text must be, in thrall to 'false worldes brotelnesse' (Tr V 1832). It might be argued that Chaucer misreads Dante's metaphorical method in the *Commedia*, but it may also be true that Chaucer regarded Dante's application of metaphor to divine truth as rendering unto Caesar that which he regarded as belonging to God.[10]

II

In the *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer uses the diversity of his heroines' responses to demonstrate both the difficulty of assaying virtue and the ways in which this difficulty was compounded by the reservations and paradoxes inherent in medieval figurations of female virtue. The classification of an act as virtuous or not was inevitably fraught with doubt. Philosophers and theologians had long recognised that virtuous acts could have disastrous consequences – at times even predictably disastrous consequences. Can an act truly be virtuous if, in preserving the moral integrity of its actor, it guarantees the suffering of others? In presenting the story of Philomela, for example, Chaucer details her suffering, but the reader may bring to the text remembrance of the gruesome revenge she and her sister prepared for Tereus. Philomela's plaint, like that of Medea, presents her at a moment after her suf-

[9] *Confessio Amantis*, VII 4783–85. These lines introduce Gower's account of the rape of Lucrece.

[10] Gospel according to St Mark, 12:17.

fering has been caused, but before she can revenge herself. There is nothing dishonest in presenting Love's martyrs, after they are stricken, and before they have others' blood on their hands, but it might be considered at the very least disingenuous. Chaucer succeeds in demonstrating the exploitable and misleading potential of literature to extract a scene from a whole life as a means of evading the certainty of post-mortem judgement, while simultaneously satirising this potential by writing of Medea, a woman whose subsequent career was all too well known.

Any judgement is further complicated by the increased importance Christian theology and the development of medieval ethics and jurisprudence had placed on the importance of intention. In the twelfth century Abelard had been prominent amongst those philosophers arguing for the crucial importance of intention in determining fault:

> Secondly, in his *Scito te ipsum* Abelard ceases to speak of sin as an act of will. Will is too equivocal a word; it may mean concupiscence and our desires, but in this sense an evil will does not constitute sin unless consent is given to it. Properly speaking, therefore, consent to an evil will constitutes sin, not the will for evil. Abelard's intention in this as in much else seems to have been to reorganize the language of traditional discussion. He rephrased Augustine's precisions in order to fashion a more rigid and unambiguous vocabulary. Augustine gave Abelard the idea of the importance of consent in the enactment of sin. Abelard thereupon selected the factor of consent to evil as the univocal definition of sin, because it was the unvarying and indispensable constituent of sin which must not be confused with the temptation or appetite or even the will which may precede it or with the action which may ensue upon it.[11]

Nor was this debate about the nature of intention confined to academic circles. By the fourteenth century English law had developed through a body of case-law the doctrine that the commission of a crime was dependent not merely on the act itself, but on the intention with which it was carried out – requiring a *mens rea* as well as an *actus reus*.[12] Cupid's interrogation of Chaucer in the Prologue for the intentions of his previous works provides a powerful, if comic, reminder of the impossibility of reading the intention embodied in texts, and the dangers posed by those readers who believe that it is possible to determine those intentions 'withouten nede of glose':

> And thow my foo and al my folk werreyest,
> And of myne olde servauntes thow mysseyest,

11 D.E. Luscombe, *Peter Abelard's Ethics* (Oxford, 1971), p. xxxiv.

12 The development of the doctrine of *mens rea* is considered, for example, by Baker and Sayre; John H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History* (London, 1990), p. 426; Francis B. Sayre, '*Mens Rea*', *Harvard Law Review* 45 (1932), 974–1026.

> And hynderest hem with thy translacioun,
> And lettest folk from hire devocioun
> To serve me, and holdest it folye
> To serve Love. . . . (LGW F 322–7)

The dispute between Chaucer and Cupid is, in part, a conflict between Classical notions of guilt, and Christian ideas, developed from the authoritative judgements of the Church fathers such as Augustine, whose formulation 'reum linguam non facit nisi mens rea' was to appear in the *Leges Henrici* as 'reum non facit nisi mens rea'.[13] But a privileging of intention raises different problems – in particular that of proving the presence or absence of an unverifiable psychological state. For Alceste, in the Prologue, it seems it is the experience of suffering which is sufficient to justify the sanctity of her acolytes, requiring no further intention to embrace patience or abjure revenge:

> In makyng of a glorious legende
> Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves,
> That weren trewe in lovyng al hire lyves; (LGW F 483–5)

The constancy of these women and the fact of suffering is sufficient to prove Alceste's wymmen 'goode' without any need to test or question their mental state, while the concept of 'assay' has become a component of callous male conceit:

> And telle of false men that hem bytraien,
> That al hir lyf ne don nat but assayen
> How many women they may doon a shame; (LGW F 486–88)

But the different importance accorded to intention is far from being the only divergence between Classical and medieval figurations of virtue. In his appropriation of Classical models of feminine action, Chaucer uses these inferred paths of divergence between Christian and Classical ideas to establish the extent to which even ethics is subject to the revising powers of time. It is an idea which is foregrounded by the inescapable incongruity of the form Chaucer creates to meet Alceste's commission. Delany notes the singular nature of Chaucer's form:

> Chaucer's *Legend* is thus a curious sport in the evolution of the hagiographical genre. Not itself hagiography, it is nonetheless generated by hagiography and the secular gallery of women. It borrows enough from hagiography to provoke a fifteenth-century reader, Bokenham, to model his own (at that point unique) all-female hagiography on the *Legend*, yet its

[13] Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1968), vol. 2, p. 597.

courtliness recommended it to the noble and middle-class reader of the day.[14]

But hagiography is possible only within the conventions of a recognised and accepted moral framework. In establishing the hybrid (or bastard) genre of *Cupids Legendes*, Chaucer's purpose was to show the incongruous results of attempting to adapt the structures of Classical and heroic exemplary narrative to Christian ends.[15] No figure more clearly exemplified this moral distance than Lucrece, the subject of Chaucer's Fifth Legend.

Praised by Classical authors for her decisive response to her dishonour, Lucretia presented difficulties for Christian commentators from Augustine onwards, who, though they might respect her courage, could not condone her commission of a mortal sin in taking her own life.[16] In attempting to accommodate the ethical *exempla* of Classical *Auctors* within a post-Classical moral framework, it was all but impossible to disguise the potential incompatibility of exemplary patterns of female virtue which valorised female virtue as an active process (the doing of virtuous acts) with those which figured it as a passive process (the endurance of 'unjustified' or undeserved physical and emotional pain). Against Lucrece's bold act of self-annihilation could be set an alternative tradition of exemplary narrative in which Christ's saints endured physical humiliation and frequent mutilation with exemplary patience, in doing so extending rather than cutting short their (earthly) suffering.[17] The fastidious care with which Lucrece stage-manages her death to prevent any further shaming of her body draws attention to her failure to take proper regard for that which cannot be seen – the state of her soul:

> But pryvely she kaughte forth a knyf
> And therwithal she rafte hirself hir lyf;
> And as she fel adoun, she kaste hir lok,
> And of hir clothes yet she hede tok.

[14] Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 60.

[15] The incongruity of the adaptation of Classical mores into medieval expectations is present in the word 'legend' itself – derived from a Latin verb *lego, legere, legi, lectum* – the range of meanings of which included 'to bring together, to gather, to collect, to observe, to overhear and to read aloud or recite'. Latham's *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (Oxford, 1965) lists 'legenda – a legend, saint's life' as a medieval coining, first recorded in a manuscript of 1190.

[16] The literary afterlife of the Lucrece story is considered by Donaldson and Saunders. Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations*, (Oxford, 1972); Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2001).

[17] Saunders notes that although rape is a recurrent threat against Christian female martyrs, the Church's teachings on the exemplary value of virginity meant that 'rape, it seems, can be threatened but never enacted in the saint's life', Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p.134.

> For in hir fallynge yet she had a care,
> Lest that hir fet or suche thyng lay bare;
> So wel she loved clennesse and eke trouthe. (LGW F 1854–60)

There is a wealth of implied, but unstated, ethical disapproval in Chaucer's separation of 'clennesse' and trouthe' into distinct, in this case perhaps even opposing, virtues. It seems that, for Lucrece, 'clennesse' is a physical state which she, mistakenly, believes to be identical with the spiritual virtue of 'trouthe'. As readers, we are forced to decide whether the violation of Lucrece's integrity takes place when she is assaulted, or when she commits the sin of self-destruction. Augustine's judgement on this was clear:

> Talis enim ab eis Lucretia magis credita est, quae se nullo adulterino potuerit, maculare consensu. Quod ergo se ipsam, quoniam adulterum pertulit, etiam non adultera occidit, non est pudicitiae caritas, sed pudoris infirmitas. . . .
>
> Non hoc fecerunt feminae Christianae, quae passae similia vivunt tamen nec in se ultae sunt crimen alienum, ne aliorum sceleribus adderent sua, si, quoniam hostes in eis concupiscendo stupra commiserant, illae in se ipsis homicidia erubescendo committerent. Habent quippe intus gloriam castitatis, testimonium conscientiae; habent autem coram oculis Dei sui nec requirunt amplius ubi quid recte faciant non habent amplius ne devient ab auctoritate legis divinae, cum male devitant offensionem suspicionis humanae.[18]
>
> (For they held rather the belief that Lucretia was not one who could have soiled herself with any spot of adulterous consent. In that case her killing herself, because, though she was not an adulteresss, yet she endured the act of an adulterer, proves, not her love of chastity, but her irresolute shame. . . .
>
> This is not what the Christian women who had the same experience and still survive did. They did not avenge a crime not their own upon themselves, but feared to add crimes of their own to those of others, which they would have done, if, because foes lusting had committed rape upon themselves. For indeed they have within themselves the glory of chastity, the witness of their conscience. They have it also in the presence of their God and need nothing more. In this case there is nothing more for them to do and do right, if they would not deviate from the authority of God's law while doing wrong to obviate the scandal of man's suspicion.)

Chaucer's reference to Augustine's 'gret compassioun' (LGW F 1690) thus requires some explanation. Frank made out a plausible case that Chaucer's familiarity with Augustine's remarks derived not from the *De Civitate Dei* itself, but from a less than clear reference to Augustine in the account of

[18] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*, ed. and trans. G.E. McCracken, (London 1957), vol. I, xix, pp. 88–91.

Lucrece in the *Gesta Romanorum*.[19] Delany, while careful to avoid dismissing Frank's suggestion, is keener to suggest that Chaucer both knew Augustine's original and chose to misrepresent it: 'Clearly this is one of those questions that cannot be unequivocally resolved, but I would like to entertain the possibility of deliberate falsification.'[20] But elements of Chaucer's text actually follow Augustine's judgement so closely that it seems implausible to deny that Chaucer had not had access to the original: 'That they forgave yt hyr, for yt was ryght;/ It was no gilt, it lay not in hyr myght' (LGW F 1848–9). The mystery of Chaucer's apparently inaccurate reading of Augustine's judgement on Lucrece proves to derive from an insufficiently careful reading of Chaucer's text. Chaucer notes that not only 'these payens', but also 'The grete Austyn' have commended Lucrece for 'hyre wifhod and hire stedfastnesse' (LGW 1687). These were the virtues Lucrece had displayed throughout her marriage, before her rape by Tarquinius and which, in Augustine's judgement, were in no way diminished by an act which was not of her choosing: 'Puduit enim eam turpitudinis alienae in se commissae, etiamsi non secum' (For she was ashamed of another's foul crime committed on her person, even though not committed with her).[21]

Augustine, Chaucer and Livy are at one in agreeing that Lucrece's rape in itself in no way implicates her in complicity, or impugns the chastity of her intentions:

> . . . consolantur aegram animi avertendo noxam ab coacta in auctorem delicti: mentem peccare, non corpus, et unde consilium afuerit, culpam abesse. 'Vos,' inquit, 'videritis, quid illi debeatur: ego me etsi peccato absolvo, supplicio non libero; nec ulla deinde inpudica Lucretiae exemplo vivet.'
>
> (They seek to comfort her, sick at heart as she is, by diverting the blame from her who was forced to the doer of the wrong. They tell it is the mind, that sins, not the body; and that where purpose has been wanting there is no guilt. 'It is for you to determine,' she answers, 'what is due to him; for my own part, though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment; not in time to come shall ever unchaste women live through the example of Lucretia.')[22]

Despite her confidantes' reassurance, the proof of intention, however, is a more complex matter, and Lucretia commits suicide as a means of demonstrating beyond doubt the unsullied nature of her intention: 'Ceterum corpus

19 Frank, *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women*, p. 97.
20 Delany, *The Naked Text*, p. 205.
21 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei Conta Paganos*, vol. I, xix, pp. 88–9.
22 B.O. Foster, trans., *Livy*, Loeb Classical Library (London 1967), Book 1, LVIII, p. 202–3.

est tantum violatum, animus insons; mors testis erit' (Yet my body only has been violated, my heart is guiltless, as death shall be my witness).[23]

For both Augustine and Chaucer's narrator, intention is judged in the sight of God, not of man, so that Lucrece's action is redundant, as well as sinful:

> Unde ad oculos hominum testem mentis suae illam poenam adhibendam putavit, quibus conscientiam demonstrare non potuit.
>
> (For this reason she thought that she must present evidence before men's eyes to show what was in her heart – the evidence of that self-punishment, since she could not exhibit her conscience to them.)[24]

It is for this reason that Augustine upbraids her, condemning her conduct with the scathing (and unexpected) word '*infirmitas*' – accusing Lucretia of being irresolute. Nowhere does Chaucer's narrator suggest any reservation about Augustine's judgement that Lucrece's rape neither required nor justified her choice of death – even though it was that act which, in the eyes of Roman commentators, guaranteed her pre-eminent reputation. For 'these payens' Lucrece's death was a public gesture, forcefully reclaiming the physical integrity which Tarquinius has assaulted, but, viewed from a Christian ethical perspective, it is an act which in no way proves 'hyre wifhod and hire stedfastnesse'. Lucretia's attempt to present her act as a gesture of public service – to prevent unchaste women claiming her as an example – is no defence against the sin of self-destruction. Augustine's 'gret compassioun' for her is justified, but is for her suffering *before* seeking her own death, and not for the self-destroying gesture praised by her Classical admirers. Through citing Augustine along with the names of 'Ovyde and Titus Livius', Chaucer is once again demonstrating the unbridgeable gap between Christian and Classical codes of ethics.

In doing so, Chaucer raises two questions about the true understanding of heroism. First, he questions whether the heroism of Cupid's 'saintes' lies in the active commission of acts, or whether it can be seen also in the patient (albeit involuntary) bearing of suffering. Clearly female rulers such as Dido and Cleopatra have the opportunity to execute acts of conspicuous bravery which might appear 'masculine' in their fulfilment of a (usually) masculine role within society. The case of abandoned women such as Phyllis and Ariadne is far less clear. Phyllis chooses to 'take Armes against a sea of troubles'[25] and ends her suffering, although both Ovid and Chaucer exploit the irony that, in the perpetual present tense of narration, she cannot experience the conclusion of her suffering. Chaucer's writing about such a woman does not merely perpetuate the memory of her suffering, but also appears to per-

23 Livy, Book 1, LVIII, p. 202.
24 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei Conta Paganos*, vol. I, xix, pp. 88–9.
25 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, 1.

petuate the suffering itself. Further, while Phyllis's decisive action might win the approbation of Classical commentators, to Christian writers it must appear un-Christian in its rejection of patience, as well as probably unfeminine in the assertiveness of her deed. In a religion where those that mourn are hailed as blessed, the imposition of suffering becomes a potential 'assay' through which the sufferer can exercise reserves of patience and faith – an assay which Phyllis clearly fails. Once again Chaucer highlights a rift between Classical and Christian ethics, in the interpretation of the patient bearing of suffering as being an active (and therefore, at least potentially, a heroic) experience or as being merely a passive process. It is far from clear whether the ability to continue living after such an experience of suffering should be considered a passive act when it might, with equal justice, be considered a conscious act of resistance. Augustine's emotional affinity with his Classical sources causes him to recognise the probability that, had she not taken her own life, Lucrece would have had 'to bear passively the shame that another had actively inflicted upon her'. More strikingly, he comes close to endorsing a view of Christian women's endurance of the same suffering as being an essentially passive process – 'there is nothing more for them to do and do right, if they would not deviate from the authority of God's law while doing wrong'. The active nature of their heroism lies in their intention, which is visible only to God.

The limitations of Augustine's view of the acceptance of suffering as being an essentially passive process become clear in the complexity of moral judgement evoked in Chaucer's account of Ariadne and Hypsipyle. The reason for Ariadne's inclusion in Chaucer's poem is merely her betrayal – she having been abandoned on a remote island, her opportunities for action are limited. It is curious, then, that the woman whose conduct, albeit fortuitously, adheres most closely to medieval and Christian models of female patience has been so roundly condemned by critics – notably by Frank, who presents her as a grotesque.[26] His disapproval of her results not from her actions but from his interpretation of her motivation, as if her physical passivity is nullified by an inappropriate psychological demonstrativeness. Less arguably, Chaucer depicts the willfulness which determines Hypsipyle's refusal to be comforted. Though Hypsipyle's future life fulfils Jerome's advice that widows should aspire to shun a second marriage,[27] it is hard not to see something of the passive–aggressive in her refusal to consider letting go of her injury:

> And trewe to Jason was she al hire lyf,
> And evere kepte hire chast, as for his wif:
> Ne nevere hadde she joye at hire herte,
> But deyede for his love, of sorwes smerte. (LGW F 1576–9)

26 Frank, *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women*, pp. 122–33.
27 Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* (Paris, 1845).

In depicting the moral ambiguity of any interpretation of the acts of Ariadne, Lucrece or Hypsipyle, Chaucer highlights the inevitable difficulty of balancing active and passive figurations of feminine virtue within the Classical exemplary tradition. Where Augustine expects Christian victims of rape to draw the strength to endure from the knowledge that God witnesses their innocence, Chaucer's Classical heroines can expect no such recourse. In the absence of the reassurance of divine omniscience, the interpretation of their guilt or innocence is dependent on the kindness of strangers – those poets and chroniclers whose texts perpetuate the memory of their experience. Chaucer recognises the power of the poet to betray his subject in the mischievously sinister words which draw the parallel between unfaithful lovers and writers, at the close of the Legend of Phyllis:

> Be war, ye wemen, of youre subtyl fo,
> Syn yit this day men may ensaumple se;
> And trusteth, as in love, no man but me. (LGW F 2559–61)

In a world in which virtue is vulnerable to misunderstanding and textual misrepresentation, Chaucer uses the *Legend* to question the nature of virtue, and the nature of suffering. In its questioning of whether virtue is something to be seized actively or exercised as a passive state, the *Legend* must be seen as the sequel to at least some of the concerns of *Troilus and Criseyde* which the Prologue announces. The characters of the *Legend* inhabit an equivalent textual space to those of *Troilus and Criseyde*, formed by Classical ethics but judged by subsequent Christian standards, and, although one might expect the questioning of ethical states of activity and passivity to be gendered, it is in the continuity of its ethical concerns that the *Legend of Good Women* is most truly a sequel to *Troilus*. In *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer creates a distance between the heroic (but off-stage) deeds of the warrior Troilus, and his exercise, though ignorant of Christianity, of the internal and spiritual virtues of patience, faith and charity privileged by Christian morality. Where Troilus comes closest to approaching Christian virtues of humility and patience in accepting his 'double sorwe', the male figure of Troilus completes a sequence within Chaucer's poetry of patient and grieving women that began with Alcione, and against which the suffering and conduct of Cupid's saints must be judged.

But the experience of Troilus is not comparable with that of Cleopatra or Philomela in the *Legend*. The sufferings of Troilus are depicted within the testimony of a narrator who claims the God-like power to represent his subject's emotions. Though the Troilus narrator does represent reported speech (or, in the case of the *Canticus Troili*, reported lyric), these episodes form a restricted element of the text, contextualised within the controlling voice of the narrator. In the *Legend*, the balance between the heroines' ability or obligation to construct their own narratives to make their own case to posterity, and their mediation through the intrusive and unreliable textual 'voice' of a

semi-characterised narrator is far more unstable. In the Legend of Cleopatra, the voice of the narrator is obscured in the second half of the tale by the reported orations of Antony and Cleopatra. In the Legend of Thisbe, which follows it, there seems little reason to doubt the narrator's 'improvisation' of Thisbe's laments. This apparent inconsistency in the level of the narrator's involvement in the verbal texture of representation is important, since it undermines the reader's faith in the reliability of the reporting of the words themselves. The process of self-textualisation in which Chaucer's Ladies seem to be engaged is compromised by the inevitable scepticism created as Chaucer reminds his readership of the possibility of ideological interference from the figure of the poetic *persona*, involved in his own separate process of textualisation, which fashions a response not only to the ostensible subject (the unfortunate Ladies) but also to the textual sources where Chaucer had found their stories. In Ovid's *Heroides* the act of writing a letter, the textualising of otherwise unreported female experience, seems to function as a gesture of self-aggrandisement by the putative authors. Even in claiming victimhood, Ovid's ladies display themselves in a manner calculated to win the approbation of posterity, rendering their virtues, and of course, their failings, as publicly witnessed acts, as man 'hath herd seyd or founde it writen'. There is a cost to be paid for such conscious acts of self-representation. In Virgil, a defining characteristic of Dido is her ability to hold her own counsel, to keep her actions and intentions hidden, but, in the *Heroides*, such discretion is incompatible with the demands of the complaint form. Chaucer both plays with the ironies of Latin literature's pre-eminent female character insisting that 'syn my name is lost' and re-ironises Ovid's role in reversing this prediction by reinscribing his name in the final line of the legend: 'Rede Ovyde, and in hym he shal fynde it' (LGW F 1367).

Both in his depiction of the inevitability of the (self)-deceit inherent in the process of self-composition, and in the questioning of the poet's right to deny anonymity to his subjects, the legend of Dido enables Chaucer to introduce into the *Legend* the second element of his questioning of the exemplary tradition(s). Should virtue be understood as a private act, witnessed and valorised in the relationship between the individual and God, or must virtue be a communal act, displaying itself to the entire world? The testimonies of his Classical heroines would seem to suggest that virtuous acts require an audience. Certainly, the decisive acts of Cleopatra and Lucrece seem to presuppose an admiring public, while even Hypsipyle's dogged chastity seems most praiseworthy when observed by others as a proof of her constancy. But Chaucer was heir to a different tradition – that of Christian humility in the exercise of virtue, exemplified in the parable of the pharisee and the publican.[28] In the

28 Gospel according to St Luke, 18:10–14.

invocation that 'let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth',[29] not merely did Christian teaching deny the importance of public display in the doing of good works, it also argued that such display changed the meaning of the act itself, in changing its intention. Such concealment seems impossible in a work like the *Legend* which apparently seeks to display conduct to exemplary purpose, and Chaucer finds both a humour and a poignancy in the gap between the Ladies' attempts to act virtuously and their simultaneous inability to achieve this most exacting of Christian standards. It might seem a counsel of perfection to expect Classical heroines, or the authors who praised their conduct, to anticipate the rigorous demands of Christian humility, but Chaucer is able to imply this un-Classical and distinctively Christian standard of behaviour in his text, illuminating, by contrary example, why, for instance, Virgil, Ovid and Boccaccio were unable to agree on the moral to be drawn from the history of Dido.

Since humility is not a moral quality valorised in Classical narrative, the moral value to be placed on privacy and secrecy, and their opposite, public declaration, becomes a necessarily contested area in the Christian recomposition of Classical *exempla*. Just as the *Legend of Good Women* is pivoted on the balance between pathos and parody, so Christian ideas of humility underpin the text in two contrasted functions – as an implicit standard of ethical judgement, and as a comic reminder that Cupid's saints have to live their lives in ignorance of ethical information which, through medieval eyes, devalues their decisions. It is a humour flecked with tragedy, as Chaucer burlesques the inference of a Christian notion of humility as an unstated standard through the work, through his comic presentation of the ethical difficulties in judging the exemplary significations of secrecy. In Christian discourse, it cannot be assumed that secrecy is necessarily an evil state, or an indicator of dubious intent, as might be assumed in a Classical narrative. Particular difficulties arise in interpreting the unexpressed intention, for secrecy of intention cannot be easily distinguished from the exemplary virtues of patience and humility – or from deception, which is not.

Though each of the plots of the legends turns on the suppression or revelation of secrets, Chaucer is careful and sparing in his use of the language of secrecy. In the unfortunate, but not unfaithful, experience of Piramus and Thisbe he introduces the vocabulary of secrecy:

> But pryvyly som tyme yit they mette
> By sleyghte, and spoken som of here desyr; (LGW F 733–4)

The word is re-introduced as a warning of Aeneas's faithless intentions:

[29] Gospel according to St Matthew, 6:3.

> And pryvyly he doth his shipes dyghte,
> And shapeth hym to stele awey by nyghte. (LGW F 1288–89)

It is absent, though, from the account of his leaving, as it is from the accounts of the similar behaviour of Jason, Demophon and Theseus. Though the word reappears twice in the account of the travails of Philomela, even there it is divorced from the direct expression of sin. In its first use, it speaks of Tereus's intention:

> And up into a forest he hire ledde,
> And to a cave pryvely hym spedde;
> And in this derke cave, yif hir leste,
> Or leste nat, he bad hire for to reste. (LGW F 2310–13)

Chaucer introduces into the text an extended pause between the intention to sin and the act itself – which makes Tereus's sin the more heinous in that he has ample opportunity to repent of his original intention. The distance between intention *alone* and completed act is present also in the deployment of the word describing Lucrece's actions preparatory to her final act:

> But pryvely she kaughte forth a knyf,
> And therwithal she rafte hirself hir lyf; (LGW F 1854–5)

Surprisingly, in an account of serial betrayers, the word 'pryvely' remains relatively uncoloured by moral inference, in a way that allows Chaucer to leave open the ethical reckoning, in this text, between openness and concealment. Even the reappearance of the word in the description of Philomela's captivity in a cell allows Chaucer to point the moral distance between secrecy, and the conduct which secrecy may conceal:

> And in a castel made hire for to be
> Ful pryvely in prisoun everemore (LGW F 2335–6)

The reappearance of 'pryvely', though it recalls and extends Philomela's experience of the cave, also recalls Tereus's pause between intention and action, allowing his victim the leisure to formulate the intention for her revenge. In a work which foregrounds women's verbal identification and expression of their plight, secrecy (and its attendant silence) functions as another contested space in the understanding of how feminine virtue is to be understood.

The disruptive potential of the inference of Christian standards of humility in exemplary narrative is of crucial importance in explaining perhaps the most curious element of the text – the selection of Alceste-as-daisy as the presiding deity whose fiat initiates the poet's collecting of exemplary narratives. Any reading of the *Legend* must engage with the question of how seriously Chaucer expected the figure of Alceste to function as a plausible

figuration of ethical value – whether she can, as Rowe and Kiser suggest,[30] be read as an exemplar of female virtue, or whether she must be understood as a demonstration of the limitations of the embodiment of female virtue.[31]

Alceste's fame derived from her choosing to die in her husband's stead, and clearly her sacrifice must be seen as a public statement affirming a communal moral vision, rather than as a hidden act of virtue. For the narrator, in the presence of Cupid, it seems that the public nature of her action enhances the value of her conduct:

> Now fele I weel the goodnesse of this wyf,
> That both aftir hir deth and in hir lyf
> Hir grete bounte doubleth hire renoun. (LGW F 520–22)

But, in so far as her act expresses a communal moral view, then the quality of intention becomes vulnerable to question, raising doubts about the ethical value of her choice. In particular, the devotion accorded Alceste causes the reader to question whether Alceste's death can properly be regarded as an expression of self-sacrifice.

The notion of sacrifice itself is capable of multiple readings. In Fradenburg's interpretation, the apparent exercise of sacrifice is in fact a complex and sophisticated expression of the will to desire:

> Desire desires, above all, its own continuation, not its fulfillment. We need our discontent in order to feel and enjoy our desire, and if events do not conspire to make us feel dissatisfied, we will arrange our own privations. The laws that we invent to guide our behavior use lack as a principle of design, intervening on one score so as to pointedly ignore another, fixing us here that we will stay away from there, and so on. The law creates and shapes desire by creating and shaping for us the *experience* of lack; without the vessel, we do not know the void inside that is pushing us on into the future by asking to be filled. . . . Also, full possession is impossible for mortal creatures; our objects of desire are always, by definition, alienable.[32]

Fradenburg defines sacrifice as a means of desire which beckons toward the death-drive:

[30] Donald W. Rowe, *Through Nature to Eternity* (Lincoln, NB, 1988); Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales*; Lisa J. Kiser, '*The Legend of Good Women*: Chaucer's *Purgatorio*', *ELH* 54 (1987), 741–60.

[31] Some of the contradictions in Chaucer's depiction of Alceste are examined in S. Meecham-Jones, ' "Myn Erthly God" – Paradigm and Parody in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*' in *Myth and its Legacy in European Literature*, ed. F. Le-Saux and Neil Thomas (Durham, 1996), pp. 93–113.

[32] L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism and Chaucer* (Minneapolis, 2002), pp. 4–5.

> *Contemptus mundi*, to be sure, joins in the opposition between enjoyment and *ascesis*; but what beats inside it may not be a heart. The death drive is formulated in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as the creature's urge to return to a state of inanimacy. Why do we repeat unpleasurable, even traumatic, experiences? What economy of pleasure or goods, what conception of an organism (self)-regulated for maximum pleasure by means of access to the most reliable goods, can explain the spectacle of human (self)-destructivity? The insentience that is within 'me' but beyond me – that which is 'in me more than myself' – drives me as well as frightens me, indeed frightens me *because* it drives me.[33]

If we accept Fradenburg's postulation of the death drive as the ultimate goal of desire, then Alceste's choice may be understood not as the surrender of self it seems to represent but, on the contrary as an extreme expression of desire, which borders on egotism. The sacrificial or self-destructive nature of the experience of each of the heroines of the *Legend* is capable of being analysed (or psychoanalysed) as the unconscious consummation of a self-enclosing desire.

Fradenburg acknowledges, however, the complex issues involved in the identification or perception of sacrifice:

> Derrida proposes that, for sacrifice to appear as such, it must take place during an atemporality that is also an *aneconomy*, an instant when actions cannot be referred to a future, products cannot be anticipated, and rewards cannot be calculated. It is the impossible time and timing of the gift. 'Understanding . . . and reason cannot seize . . . it; neither can they negate [it]: in the act of *giving death*, sacrifice suspends both the work of negation and work itself, perhaps even the work of mourning.
>
> But . . . the violence and excess of sacrifice keeps close company with calculation. The impossible time of the gift does not so much suspend economy as time it. Sacrifice means to get back, with interest, whatever it renounces. . . . The tight bond between calculation and aneconomy is one of the organizing principles of the Christian testament . . .[34]

In the second proposition, Fradenburg comes close to defining a model which might be termed 'transactional sacrifice' – in which each carefully reckoned act of sacrificial volition might be expected to be repaid with foreseeable and beneficial consequences. In the case of Alceste, the transactional nature of her choice is apparent – her voluntary death is paid back by the continued survival of her husband and her 'sacrifice' could therefore be con-

33 Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, p. 17.
34 Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love*, pp. 14–15.

sidered to be a wholly rational decision, based on the measurement of potential benefits. Though congruous with both Classical and Old Testament patterns of buying the favour of the gods/God with ritual sacrifice, it is arguable how far such a rational bargaining with mortality deserves the name of sacrifice, if sacrifice is to be valorised as an altruistic example of human good in action.

But Chaucer would have reckoned the moral worth of Alceste's action in a set of scales weighted differently from those utilised by Fradenburg. Fradenburg's model draws on Freud and Lacan to develop a model of psychological development which is physical, but never metaphysical. For Chaucer the atemporality that Derrida postulates certainly existed, and was an aspect of the nature of God – from which human wisdom was excluded, but which it could not doubt. For Chaucer, then, the difficulty in interpreting the ethical value of the sacrifice of Alceste lay in attempting, through the imperfect human tools of reason and the written tradition, to elucidate the judgement of divine wisdom – and the subject of the *Legend of Good Women* is the imperfectness of that attempt.[35]

Drawing both on Christian doctrine and traditions developed by the Church Fathers, Chaucer's judgement of the integrity of his ladies' actions must be determined by the issue of intention. Since intention is an internal state, not capable of proof except in the eyes of God, there can be no escape from uncertainty in the framing of judgement. Readers are as much at the mercy of the good faith of the ladies' testimony as they had been on the good faith of their lovers' protestations, which is scarcely an encouraging precedent. That is not to suggest that it is Chaucer's purpose to cast doubt on their 'trouthe', rather his purpose is to show that all human judgement cannot escape resting on an exercise of faith. To make this statement of uncertainty convincing, Chaucer must also introduce into the legends the possibility of an alternative explanation for his ladies' conduct, an explanation which would diminish or nullify the worthiness of their conduct.

That possibility is already present in the depiction of Alceste, hailed by Cupid as 'kalender . . . To any woman that wol lover bee' (LGW F 542–3). Confusion surrounds Chaucer's source for the presentation of such an unfamiliar character, a character apparently lacking any traceable medieval tradition as an exemplar. Though Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum* supplied the details of her life, there is nothing in Boccaccio's account which would explain Chaucer's choice of this (in Boccaccio's account) unexceptional figure from the massed ranks of female virtue. The selection of Alceste suggests that Chaucer's reading may have wandered more widely than has previ-

35 The different understanding of models of sacrifice in the composition of the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Confessio Amantis* will be discussed in S. Meecham-Jones, 'Gower and Sacrifice' in *Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Context*, ed. Malte Urban (Amsterdam, forthcoming).

ously been assumed. The unexplained reference to Agaton in the prologue to the *Legend* should not be dismissed from presenting evidence that Chaucer had, perhaps during his time in Italy, had access to a manuscript of Plato's *Symposium* – a text in which the ethical value of Alceste's conduct is questioned.[36] Diotima, perhaps significantly the only female voice amongst the gathering of Athenians discussing philosophy, raises the possibility that Alceste's behaviour derived from a combination of vanity and the desire for approbation – that is, from Classical standards of heroism, rather than from any notion of self-denying virtue:

> 'Do you suppose', she asked, 'that Alcestis would have died for Admetus, or Achilles have sought death on the corpse of Patroclus, or your own Codrus have welcomed it to save the kingdom of his children, if they had not expected to win a deathless memory for valour which we know keep? Of course not. I hold it is for immortal distinction and for such illustrious renown as this that they all do all they can, and so much the more in proportion to their excellence'.[37]

The terms of her analysis are mischievously recalled in the precise terms of the narrator's paean of praise to Alceste:

> Now fele I weel the goodnesse of this wyf
> That both aftir hir deth and in hir lyf
> Hir grete bounte doubleth hire renoun. (LGW F 520–22)

The desire for 'illustrious renown' is displayed by many of Chaucer's ladies. A concern for reputation, and its effect on Lucrece's intention, is made clear in Boccaccio's account of the rape of Lucrece, as it had been in Livy's version:

> . . . a tam obscena infamia terrefacta, timens, si eo occideretur pacto, purgatorem sue innocentie defuturum, et ob id aspernanti animo corpus permisit adultero.[38]
>
> (. . . fearynge that so greate an infamye myght cum therof, if so she shulde be slayne, agaynste hyr wyll offrede to hym hyr chaste body.)[39]

[36] It is not the purpose of this essay to make the case that the *Legend* shows a direct knowledge on Chaucer's part of Plato's *Symposium*. Certainly, there were manuscripts available in Western Europe, to which Chaucer might have had access, or from which he might have benefited through an intermediary such as Strode. Historians of philosophy have generally argued that the absence of detailed analysis of characters and images from the *Symposium* shows that the text was scarcely known but, by the same standard, the explicit references here to Agaton and Alceste demand explanation.

[37] Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (London, 1961), pp. 197, 199.

[38] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca, (Milan, 1967), vol. X, p. 196.

[39] Henry Parker, Lord Morley, *Forty-Six Lives Translated from Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus*, ed. Herbert G. Wright (London, 1943), p. 156.

Chaucer adapts Boccaccio's version, introducing Lucrece's swoon as a guarantee of her denial of consent, but this enables him to allow some prominence to the importance Lucrece attaches to her reputation, and the likely effect of this on her subsequent actions:

> These Romeyns wyves lovede so here name
> At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame,
> That, what for fer of sclaunder and drede of deth,
> She loste bothe at ones wit and breth,
> And in a swogh she lay, and wex so ded
> Men myghte smyten of hire arm or hed;
> She feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr. (LGW F 1812–18)

The shadow of posterity's judgements can be seen also as, at the very least, some motivation in the thoughts of Cleopatra and Phyllis – in which there is no sign of humility or the wish to act 'pryvyly':

> 'And thilke covenant whil me lasteth breth
> I wol fulfille; and that shal ben wel sene,
> Was nevere unto hire love a trewer quene.' (LGW F 693–5)

> Thanne preye I God thow peynted be also,
> That folk may rede forby as they go,
> 'Lo! This is he that with his flaterye
> Bytraised hath and don hire vilenye
> That was his trewe love in thought and dede!' (LGW F 2538–42)

This awareness of the judging eye of history cannot avoid recalling the contrary example, but similar (and curiously self-aggrandising) awareness, of Criseyde:

> 'Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
> Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
> No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
> O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
> Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge!
> And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.
> Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle! (Tr V 1058–64)

Though Chaucer suggests that the urge to memorialise their suffering in textual form involves some measure of self-conceit, it is too easy to assume that his flavouring of the *Legend* with ironic humour diminishes his awareness of the reality of female suffering in a society suspicious of female 'assertion'. For Thisbe, Philomela and Dido (as for Criseyde), the textualisation of experience allows the (probably ephemeral) sublimation of pain. In the plaint of Dido, the consciousness within the narrative comes close to formulating the idea of suffering as the (perhaps inevitable) progenitor of narrative:

> 'But syn my name is lost thourgh yow,' quod she
> 'I may wel lese on yow a word or letter,
> Al be it that I shal ben nevere the better,' (LGW F 1361–3)

It is a suggested parallel which neither guarantees the moral value of the ladies' actions and intentions, nor offers a valuable return for their suffering but, in a world in which 'tydynges' endure, Chaucer posits the idea of suffering as narrative, introducing an implied symmetry between the sacrificial nature of authorship – active in shaping the text but passive in the face of the audience's interpretation of the text. Being misunderstood is the inescapable price to be paid for love or for authorship, a point the narrator makes clear in his account of that most ambivalent of exemplars, Aeneas:

> It is a routhe and pite for to here.
> But as in love, alday it happeth so
> That oon shal laughen at anothers wo. (LGW F 1249–51)

Perhaps the rigorous irony and inappropriate sprightliness of this supposedly celebratory and respectful poem was necessary because the *Legend* offers a deeply pessimistic view of the relationship of narrative to suffering, in which the structures of poetic narrative offer an ineffective and insufficient strategy for the recovery of loss. If Chaucer's ladies seem a little too eager to justify the purity of their intention, or gild the 'renoun' of their honour, we should not expect that Chaucer has proposed too harsh a judgement on their strategies of self-promotion and self-deception. Their efforts to convince us of the public nature of their virtue reveal a sublimated drive for justification – that is, that their travails should not prove to be without meaning. As our guide through a varied, yet depressingly repetitive, catalogue of physical and psychological injury, Chaucer shows their need to rescue their experience from randomness, even as he uses the uneven texture of an (apparently) unfinished text to deny their desire. Through the plaints of the Ladies, and the narrative voice which recounts them, Chaucer represents narrative as inherently deceiving – sometimes consciously, sometimes not – merely offering its victims an illusion of control over their experience. It is the nature of literature to copy that which has existed, and to copy badly, and for that reason, Chaucer suggests, it is inevitable that the written word must 'hem bytraien'. However worthy the behaviour of Chaucer's ladies, and whether their virtue is concealed or publicly expressed, the possibility of true 'assay' is erased by the distance between 'sooth' which exists in the metaphysical sphere of God's judgement, and the representation of sooth achievable in the merely physical medium of literature – 'of remembraunce the keye'.

Where for Dante, as for Alan of Lille, the structures of narrative offered the promise of redeeming suffering, through making sense of human ordeals within a grand metaphysical narrative, Chaucer decouples the reconciliation of lived and written narratives proposed in Dante's literary model. Chaucer's

scarcely comforting conclusion is rather to demonstrate the impotence of literature in preventing or balming pain, and, in doing so, to show how feebly literature can represent or witness, far less comprehend, the exigencies of human suffering. In the *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer ruefully but ruthlessly demonstrates the inability of exemplary literature to explain, and its incapacity to justify, the ever-presence of human suffering.

7

The God of Love and Love of God: Palinodic Exchange in the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* and the 'Retraction'

JAMIE C. FUMO

'Texts, books, and discourses,' writes Foucault, 'really began to have authors (other than mythical, "sacralized" and "sacralizing" figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive.'[1] For Foucault, modern copyright laws and authors'-rights litigation evoke a space of authorial definition with premodern origins: the complex of theological, moral, and social norms which defined the proper balance between 'the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous.' The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* – with its portrayal of Chaucer's literary trial and punishment in the court of the God of Love – crystallizes, in dramatic terms, Foucault's insight concerning the relationship among the author function, transgressive discourse, and the prospect of punishment. Indeed, much of the mystique that the *Legend of Good Women* has held for critics surrounds its status as a self-portrait of Chaucer at a crucial stage in his development as an author or, in Sheila Delany's formulation, his transition from a readerly to an authorial (and specifically Foucauldian) narrative presence.[2]

The *Legend of Good Women* is also a palinode, a recantation of Chaucer's portrayals of women and love in his earlier works, especially *Troilus and*

1 M. Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinov (New York, 1984), p. 108.

2 S. Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 31–2, suggests that in the *Legend*, Chaucer's confrontation with the consequences of his writing and the idea of his literary posterity amounts to an encounter with his 'author-function' as Foucault has defined the term. Delany does not, however, consider the relevance of the attendant issue of transgression and punishment when drawing this connection with Foucault. R.W. Frank, Jr, *Chaucer and* The Legend of Good Women (Cambridge, MA, 1972) was the first to emphasize the transitional quality that distinguishes the *Legend* in Chaucer's development as author.

Criseyde and the *Romaunt of the Rose*. In this sense, the *Legend* bears important formal similarities to other well-known moments of recantation in Chaucer's works: the end of *Troilus* (which itself prefigures the *Legend* at 5.1777–78) and the 'Retraction' at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, which reject the 'worldly vanitees' (*CT* X.1085; cf. *Tr* 5.1837) that have previously attracted Chaucer's poetic energies.[3] The inherent ambivalence of the literary mode of the palinode is memorably sketched at the end of the 'Manciple's Tale,' a tale about the dangers of taletelling, in a passage that clearly points ahead to Chaucer's 'Retraction':

> But he that hath mysseyd, I dar wel sayn,[4]
> He may by no wey clepe his word agayn.
> Thyng that is seyd is seyd, and forth it gooth,
> Though hym repente, or be hym nevere so looth. (*CT* IX.353–56)

The fact that this warning occurs thirty-five lines into a rambling speech about the dangers of loquacity only adds irony to ambivalence. The rhetorical aims and effects of the palinode as a medieval literary convention have been importantly reconstructed by two recent studies, F. Percival's *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (1998) and A. Obermeier's comprehensive documentation of the *apologia* as a broadly European genre in *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-Criticism in the European Middle Ages* (1999). Both Percival and Obermeier stress the capacity of the literary palinode to function as a 'rhetorical ploy',[5] a literary game, which often serves implicitly to validate and defend rather than retract and negate. L.J. Kiser has also seen the *Legend* palinode as more importantly a defense than a rejection of Chaucer's earlier works, particularly with regard to their strategies of reconciling the classical past with the Christian present, and has argued that the *Legend*, far from undermining the validity of Chaucer's canon, actually satirizes the consequences of his canon's misreading.[6]

Surprisingly little attention has been paid, however, to the relationship between the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* and its most infamous palinodic cousin, the 'Retraction' – especially when we recall that Chaucer's revision of the *Legend* Prologue very likely overlapped with his composition

3 All citations of Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. L.D. Benson (Boston, 1987). J.S.P. Tatlock, 'The Epilogue of Chaucer's *Troilus*', *Modern Philology* 18, no. 12 (1921), 113–47, at p. 144, has noted that the end of the *Troilus* and the 'Retraction' both specifically reject 'worldly vanitees'.

4 Cf. *LGW* F 323, in which the God of Love uses the word 'mysseyest' to characterize Chaucer's literary transgression.

5 F. Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 154. A. Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-Criticism in the European Middle Ages* (Amsterdam, 1999).

6 L.J. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the* Legend of Good Women (Ithaca, 1983), p. 93.

of much of the *Canterbury Tales* in the 1390s.[7] A closer look reveals several striking correspondences in language and situation between the God of Love's judgment of Chaucer in the Prologue of the *Legend* and the judgment by the Christian God that Chaucer fearfully imagines in the 'Retraction', both of which center upon the issue of Chaucer's responsibility for his writings and their influence upon his readers' actions, and both of which further contemplate issues of translation, authorial intent, and penance. To explore the intertextual relationship between these two metatextual Chaucerian accounts of the meaning and value of his poetic activity is to address two goals: first, to sharpen our understanding of Chaucer's imagination of his works' reception, literary as well as spiritual; and second, to approach the contested issue of the import of the 'Retraction' (indeed, its literal meaning) from a fresh angle.[8] After establishing the situational parallels between the Prologue of the *Legend* and the 'Retraction', I will suggest that the palinodic exchange between the two texts enhances what certain critics have seen as the playful or rhetorically self-conscious character of the 'Retraction'. My ultimate interest here, however, is in the *Legend* and the 'Retraction' as they express conceptions of authorship – human and divine – that Chaucer explores most provocatively in those of his writings that foreground the issue of authorial responsibility in the context of God's judgment. Despite what seems at first glance to be the straightforward opposition between the twin judgments of Chaucer as a literary and as a spiritual being in these two palinodes, medieval scholastic conceptions of God's involvement in artistic creation join with the complex 'Christianization' of courtly value systems in the Prologue of the *Legend* to unsettle the imaginative distance between these two texts. Though some of the works Chaucer condemns in his 'Retraction' are praised in the Prologue to the *Legend*, and vice versa, *Troilus and Criseyde*, notably, is the only work condemned in both passages, and moreover for different reasons – neither of them true to the poem in any but the most narrow of senses. The final stage of my argument, therefore, will

7 For the purposes of this study, I follow the majority opinion that the G Prologue represents Chaucer's revision and dates from 1394 or later. For the purposes of citation, I treat the F-version as my default text and cite G only when it varies significantly from F. Kiser notes in passing some general similarities between the *Legend* Prologue and the 'Retraction' in the last paragraph of her study, pp. 153–4. P.W. Travis, 'Deconstructing Chaucer's Retraction', *Exemplaria* 3 (1991), 135–58, at p. 143, mentions the *Legend* briefly at one point in his discussion of the 'Retraction'. Obermeier's consideration of both the *Legend* Prologue and the 'Retraction' as examples of the literary *apologia* represents the only significant comparison of the two texts (*History and Anatomy*, pp. 192–220, esp. 199, 214, 219), and her work forms an important background to the present study.

8 I have been influenced here by Obermeier's contextualization of the rhetorical strategies of auctorial self-criticism in terms of modern notions of intertextuality, autoreflexivity, and metatextuality (*History and Anatomy*, pp. 18–20).

involve plotting the *Troilus*, especially its problematic final hundred lines, on the map of authorship, intention, and responsibility within which this essay situates the *Legend* Prologue and the 'Retraction', and considering how this scheme is complicated by the *Troilus*'s own slippage into a palinodic withdrawal which contradicts the interpretations performed by both of these later texts.

Reckonings

Chaucer worked closely to erect an ironic Christian shadow-text as backdrop to the courtly, mythological scene of action in the *Legend* Prologue. The important speech in which Chaucer articulates his own authorial intentions in his defense begins by calling attention to the paradoxical relationship between Christian and courtly/literary judgment: 'Madame, the God above / Foryelde yow that ye the god of Love / Han maked me his wrathe to foryive' (F 456–58).[9] In fact, Chaucer's is the first voice in the Prologue (which is here near its end) to acknowledge that the relationship between the courts of 'the God above' and the God of Love is a hierarchical, rather than metonymic one. The interpenetration of courtly and Christian systems of reference is, of course, a conventional aspect of the 'religion of love,' and Chaucer pushes it to the breaking point frequently in the *Troilus*. This conflation is equally prominent (and morally problematic) in the *Legend*, for instance in Alceste's flippant reference to Chaucer's orthodox works as 'other holynesse' (F 424), in the naughtily ironic 'Ne shal no trewe lover come in helle' (F 553), and also in the Prologue's overall pseudo-Christian scheme of heresy, judgment, and penance – imagery which Chaucer toned down in the G-revision.[10] In the *House of Fame*, Chaucer had already experimented, in a non-erotic context, with a scene of 'literary' judgment bearing mock-Christian overtones: Fame's parody of Judgment Day as she doles out reward and punishment on the basis of (irrational) grace more than of human works.

9 Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, pp. 131–48, cogently reads this speech as central to the defense of vernacular *auctoritas* which is the main thematic concern of the *Legend* Prologue.

10 For a consideration of such 'religious' imagery as it pertains to the question of revision, see Delany, *Naked Text*, pp. 36–7. On the conventionality of Chaucer's use of ecclesiastical imagery in the context of secular love, see W.G. Dodd, *Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower*, Harvard Studies in English 1 (Boston, 1913), pp. 211–14. Kiser argues that the God of Love's 'identity crisis' – his attempt to merge the courtly and the ecclesiastical into one unproblematic unity – functions as Chaucer's parody of awkward medieval literary attempts to reconcile pagan and Christian values (à la the *Ovide Moralisé*) (*Telling Classical Tales*, pp. 67–70). Theresa Tinkle, *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry*, *Figurae*: Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford, 1996), pp. 201–2, also interprets Chaucer's God of Love as an image of a constrictive literary tradition.

Is there a shadow-text of another sort in Chaucer's 'Retraction'? Several parallels between the palinodic structures of the *Legend* Prologue and the 'Retraction' command our attention. Both palinodes are prompted by and in some way attached to Chaucer's most ambitious and original literary achievements, *Troilus* and the *Canterbury Tales*.[11] In the 'Retraction', as in the *Legend*, we are confronted with a scenario of impending judgment in which Chaucer attempts to define his 'entente' as author in the context of his works' reception and moral influence upon his readers: 'For oure book seith, "Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine", and that is myn *entente*' (*CT* X.1083; my italics); 'what so myn auctour mente, / Algate, God woot, yt was myn *entente* / To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce' (*LGW* F 470–72; my italics).[12] In both works, Chaucer's expression of his 'entente' is preceded by the possibility that his literary sins are merely venial, that the fault lies not in Chaucer's malice but in his naïveté in selecting or shaping his matter: 'And if ther be any thyng that displese hem, I preye hem also that they arrette it to the defaute of myn unkonnynge and nat to my wyl, that wolde ful fayn have seyd bettre if I hadde had konnynge' (*CT* X.1082); compare Alceste's defense of Chaucer as expanded in the G-version:

> Or elles, sire, for that this man is nyce,
> He may translate a thyng in no malyce,
> But for he useth bokes for to make,
> And taketh non hed of what matere he take,
> Therfore he wrote the Rose and ek Crisseyde
> Of innocence, and nyste what he seyde. (*LGW* G 340–45)

Both the *Legend* and the 'Retraction' concern themselves with the issue of translation and its relation to authorial intention and culpability. In the

[11] Unlike earlier readers of Chaucer, modern critics unanimously accept the authenticity of the 'Retraction', and its hermeneutic significance in the context of the *Canterbury Tales*, and Fragment X in particular, has increasingly been appreciated. Most critics follow the testimony of the Ellesmere manuscript (San Marino, Huntington Library, 26.C.9) and London, British Library, MS Harley 7334 in placing the 'Retraction' at the end of the 'Parson's Tale' – despite its citations of works beyond the *Canterbury Tales* – though M.C. Wolfe, 'Placing Chaucer's 'Retraction' for a Reception of Closure', *Chaucer Review* 33 (1999), 427–31, has recently challenged the tradition of attaching the 'Retraction' to the *Canterbury Tales* as editorial and not necessarily authorial, expanding on an idea first suggested by R.M. Lumiansky (see J.D. Gordon, 'Chaucer's Retraction: A Review of Opinion', in *Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh*, ed. M. Leach [Philadelphia, 1961], pp. 81–96, at p. 88).

[12] Travis, 'Deconstructing', p. 143 points out this parallel between the *Legend* and the 'Retraction', reading these expressions of 'entente' as sincere. M. Furrow, 'The Author and Damnation: Chaucer, Writing, and Penitence', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 33 (1997), 245–57, at p. 249, in contrast, links Chaucer's use of 'entente' in the 'Retraction' (she does not consider the parallel usage in the *Legend*) to the 'moral instability' of the concept of intention in works like *Troilus* and the 'Pardoner's Tale'.

passage quoted above, Alceste rebuts the God of Love's targeting of the misguided *Romaunt* and *Troilus* specifically as translations (F 324 and 329) by arguing that Chaucer's perpetuation of 'heresye' through translation is less serious a crime than original literary creation would be. Chaucer, in his defense, later argues that translators, far from acting as mere scribes, exercise the power actively to reshape meaning, 'what so myn auctour mente' (F 470).[13] However, if Chaucer affirms in the *Legend* that it was his prerogative as a translator to transform the antifeminist *Il Filostrato* into the sympathetic *Troilus*, in the 'Retraction', he curiously backs away from the fact that he further transformed the same poem from a sympathetic to an ascetic and penitential one.[14] Here, Chaucer appears himself to revert to Cupid's flawed logic and limitations as a reader in categorically repudiating his '*translacions* and enditynges of worldly vanitees' without considering their implicit or explicit critiques of worldly vanities, much less the potential value of secular literature within a Christian universe (*CT* X.1085; my italics). In these ways, both palinodes balance an expression of authorial intention with an awareness of readers' powers to shape meaning and the dangers of misinterpretation.

Of course, both the *Legend* Prologue and the 'Retraction' feature lists of the Chaucerian works at issue, the condemned along with the approved. Both project a future of penance for these sinful writings, and in similar terms: the 'Retraction' in its prayer that '*from hennes forth unto my lyves ende* sende me grace to biwayle my giltes and to studie to the salvacioun of my soule' through penance, confession, and satisfaction (*CT* X.1090; my italics), and the *Legend* in its assignation of a penance in which 'Thow shalt, *while that thou lyvest, yer by yere*, / The moste partye of thy tyme spende / In makyng of a glorious legende' (F 481–43; my italics). There are more linguistic crossovers as well: for example, the echo some readers have noticed of the *Legend*'s 'many a lay and many a thing' (F 430) in a parallel position in the

[13] For a useful discussion of medieval attitudes toward 'active' translation, see Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, pp. 135–40.

[14] Indeed, the God of Love's criticism of the *Romaunt* provides a model by which we might have expected, in the 'Retraction', a work like *Troilus* to be upheld as consistent with Christian morality:

> Thow hast translated the Romauns of the Rose,
> That is an heresye ageyns my lawe,
> And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe;
> And thynkest in thy wit, that is ful col,
> That he nys but a verray propre fol
> That loveth paramours to harde and hote. (*LGW* G 255–60)

However, instead of recalling the polemical ending of *Troilus*, in which the world – not women – is the unfaithful party, and instead of considering its implicit critique of the amatory excesses of its protagonists, the God of Love reads the poem simply as antifeminist, because it tells the story of an unfaithful woman.

list in the 'Retraction' of Chaucer's works, 'many a song and many a leccherous lay (*CT* X.1087). And to the extent that the Parson's rejection of 'fables and swich wrecchednesse' (X.34) in his 'Prologue' is of a piece with the penitential impulse of the 'Retraction,' we can perhaps also hear echoes of the *Legend*'s extensive play with the fruit and chaff commonplace (where the fruit represents the predominantly good nature of women and the chaff connotes irrelevant stories about bad women [*LGW* G 74, F 190, G 312, G 529]) in the idea of poetry itself as 'draf' better left behind in order to experience the nourishment of the kernel of moral truth (*CT* X.35).

We have good reason, therefore, to characterize the intertextual connection between the Prologue of the *Legend* and the 'Retraction' as more than casual or coincidental. Instead, these crossovers on the level of language, situation, and theoretical concern suggest strategic planning on Chaucer's part – and where there is strategy in Chaucer, there is often mischief. This system of parallels represents, I suggest, a familiar intra-authorial exercise of the same characteristically Chaucerian sort that created with exceeding economy a moment of brutal irony in the 'Merchant's Tale' by saying of May, 'Lo, pitee renneth soone in gentil herte!' (*CT* IV.1986) when we already have come to identify the line with the high ideals of Theseus; or when first the Knight and then the Friar in the 'General Prologue' are described as 'worthy'; or when Chaucer uses the same Platonic tag, 'the wordes moote be cosyn to the deed,' to open up the possibilities of storytelling in the 'General Prologue' and to shut them down in the 'Manciple's Tale'. The 'Retraction', that is, advances a Christian counterpart of the same complex of motifs presented in the scene of literary judgment in the *Legend* Prologue; however, given the fact that such a similar self-judgment has already been formulated toward the opposite end – that is, the *affirmation* of worldly vanities – in the earlier work (itself, of course, revoked in the 'Retraction'), we are given pause in our interpretation of Chaucer's final palinode. In other words, the assumption that the sentiments of the 'Retraction' simply supersede and replace those of the *Legend* Prologue is unsettled by our recollection of the tongue-in-cheek craftedness of this earlier self-evaluation it so resembles, the earlier episode's form as a self-conscious literary device, and its clear inadequacy as an interpretation of Chaucer's literary efforts. If the *Legend* Prologue, following palinodic convention, undercuts itself and thus defends Chaucer's own misunderstood tactics as a writer, so does the precedent of the *Legend* threaten both to undercut the 'Retraction' and to expose the strategies by which the 'Retraction', as a palinode, threatens to undermine itself.

To what extent does our recognition of the literary dialogue between the *Legend* and the 'Retraction' dovetail with current trends in the interpretation of Chaucer's 'Retraction'? The 'Retraction' is increasingly taken seriously as a document with literary, historical, and, to some degree, biographical validity. Exegetical critics have regarded its moral stance as germane to Chaucer's artistic procedures throughout his poetry; others have contextualized the

repudiation of 'worldly vanitees' in the 'Retraction' in terms of the eschatological movement of the later parts of the *Canterbury Tales*,[15] the expectations of medieval narrative structure,[16] the historicity of Chaucer's eleventh-hour repentance as related (or imagined) by Thomas Gascoigne,[17] and the controversies surrounding the use of fables and of the vernacular in late medieval England.[18] However, alongside these attempts to re-authorize the 'Retraction', as it were, an important counter-trend has developed, which could be characterized as the 'rhetorical' approach: ironic or deconstructive readings of the 'Retraction' which focus on its rhetorical and linguistic characteristics and are often attentive to its connections on these levels to other parts of Chaucer's works. While such approaches often maintain the appropriateness and even the solemnity of the 'Retraction' in Fragment X, they tend to downplay its finality and its seeming insulation from the value system of most of what has come before; in this sense, they would seem to offer a useful context for the present reading of the 'Retraction' in light of Chaucer's earlier courtly palinode.[19] R.S. Knapp, for example, draws atten-

15 R. Delasanta, 'Penance and Poetry in the *Canterbury Tales*', *PMLA* 93 (1978), 240–7.

16 G.C. Schricker, 'On the Relation of Fact and Fiction in Chaucer's Poetic Endings', *Philological Quarterly* 60 (1981), 13–27; J. Dean, 'Chaucer's Repentance: A Likely Story', *Chaucer Review* 24 (1989), 64–76. In an important article on the literary-historical backgrounds of the 'Retraction', O. Sayce ('Chaucer's "Retractions": The Conclusion of the *Canterbury Tales* and its Place in Literary Tradition', *Medium Aevum* 40 [1971], 230–48) similarly points to its roots in convention, but unlike Schricker and Dean, detects irony in Chaucer's use of these conventions. The quick move in Sayce's argument from convention to irony has met with a good deal of disagreement in later criticism, but it is worth noting that Sayce points not simply to the backdrop of convention but to the fissures and internal contradictions of that convention when characterizing Chaucer's critical, rather than unconscious, reuse of traditional motifs. This, in effect, is the same argumentative approach that Jill Mann takes in her much more widely accepted reading of Chaucer's reimagination of the conventions of medieval estates satire in the 'General Prologue', *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the* General Prologue *to the* Canterbury Tales (Cambridge, 1973).

17 D. Wurtele, 'The Penitence of Geoffrey Chaucer', *Viator* 11 (1980), 335–59; Dean, 'Chaucer's Repentance', 64–76.

18 Furrow, 'Author and Damnation', 245–57. As probably the most controversial half-page in Chaucer's corpus, the 'Retraction' has attracted copious amounts of scholarly attention. Useful summaries of critical opinion may be found in Gordon, 'Chaucer's Retraction', pp. 81–96; Wurtele, 'Penitence', pp. 338–9; Travis, 'Deconstructing', pp. 137–47; and Obermeier, *History and Anatomy*, p. 210, n. 119.

19 Sometimes this combination of discomfort with the 'Retraction' and acceptance of its thematic integrity in Fragment X takes the form of imagining (fancifully, but not impossibly) that the 'Retraction' was not necessarily Chaucer's final, cataclysmic touch to the *Canterbury Tales*. E.P. Hammond, for example, advances the dizzying theory that the 'Retraction' is 'neither a final nor a death-bed production, but a deliberately-planned conclusion, written while the *Canterbury Tales* was in the process of arrangement, possibly even before some of the Tales which "sounen unto synne" had

tion to the structural similarities between the self-canceling rhetorical tactics of irony and of retraction. While the relationship between irony and retraction, like game and earnest, words and the Word, is hierarchical, their underlying rhetorical similarities allow them to participate in a more ambiguous kind of interchange, one in which the shift from secular literature to religious purpose entails less a rejection than an exchange, and in which, according to Knapp, 'Chaucer merely gives up a weak semiotic system in favor of a stronger one.'[20] V.Y. Haines, though apparently unaware of Knapp's article, makes a similar connection between irony and retraction, and shows how an awareness of their shared rhetorical space can support, *mutatis mutandis*, an essentially exegetical reading of Chaucer. For Haines, the point is not that retraction extends the literary game of irony into earnest, but rather that all irony is, in essence, retraction: 'retraction', then, is already inscribed in all of the ironic moments in which Chaucer aims to pull the reader back from an approval of worldly vanities. In the 'Retraction', Haines argues, the source of Chaucer's worry lies simply in the possibility that readers missed his irony; the 'Retraction' functions not to revoke his works but, paradoxically, to 'affirm the rhetorical "retraccioun" that are already in [his works].'[21]

Other critics have seized upon the structural and rhetorical inconsistencies of the 'Retraction' highlighted by both Sayce and Wurtele to advance a deconstructive reading.[22] R. Boenig, for example, finds in the simultaneous

taken form' (Hammond, 'Book of the Twenty-Five Ladies', *MLN* 48 [1933], 514–16; quoted in Gordon, 'Chaucer's Retraction', p. 86). D. Pearsall fancies that Chaucer spent the final months of his life in the tenement adjoined to Westminster Abbey 'expanding the plan of *The Canterbury Tales* and adding the non-finishing touches to the Cook's Tale rather than sinking into the penitential gloom that preceded the deathbed repentance that Thomas Gascoigne so predictably attributes to him' (Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* [Oxford, 1992], p. 275).

20 R.S. Knapp, 'Penance, Irony, and Chaucer's Retraction', *Assays* 2 (1982), 45–67, at p. 49. In order to recognize the subversiveness of this position, consider that even R.M. Jordan, in his seminal study of Chaucer's proto-postmodern poetics of skepticism and multiplicity, concedes that the 'Retraction', along with the end of *Troilus*, represents Chaucer's awareness of an ultimate universal order of stable, fixed truths which stands in opposition to the more familiar world of unstable human language. For Jordan, these two dissimilar 'epistemologies' are simply at odds; for Knapp, they are nearly interchangeable. See R.M. Jordan, *Chaucer's Poetics and the Modern Reader* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 104, 173–4.

21 V.Y. Haines, 'Where are Chaucer's "Retraccioun?" ' *Florilegium* 10 (1988–91), 127–49, at p. 144.

22 Sayce, 'Chaucer's "Retractions" ', pp. 230–48, points to the ironic effect of Chaucer's attempt to consolidate various conflicting penitential motifs in the 'Retraction', while Wurtele, 'Penitence', pp. 335–59, argues on the basis of problems in the structure of the 'Retraction' that it is actually a composite text, part of which belongs in the 'Parson's Tale'. Jordan, despite his opinion that the 'Retraction' marks Chaucer's departure from the world of poetic contingency to one of universal verities (see n. 20 above), briefly notes the effect of 'rhetorical collage' in the varying voices and aims of

affirmation and denial of art by the 'Retraction' – by virtue of its embeddedness within one of the very works it largely retracts – overtones of the language of pseudo-Dionysian mysticism.[23] And P. Travis's illuminating deconstruction of the 'Retraction' and its criticism shows that the 'Retraction' creates a 'hermeneutic double bind' by first defending the moral capacity of secular art through responsible reading ('Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine') and then denying his secular art anything more than a literal reading by revoking it. Travis goes on to argue that the hermeneutic challenges posed by the 'Retraction', far from resolving or negating the project of evaluating secular literature, mirror the very literary strategies that Chaucer uses throughout his works to draw his readers into the tricky project of interpretation.[24] All of these 'rhetorical' approaches have in common, then, the reincorporation of the 'Retraction' into the flawed poetic cosmos from which it attempts to remove itself; all argue in some sense that the 'Retraction' is 'a logical continuation of persistent and pervasive and thoroughly conventional Chaucerian self-criticism' or hermeneutic play.[25]

This, it seems to me, is a meaningful context within which to evaluate the palinodic dynamics between the 'Retraction' and the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. How to define this intertextual relationship? Does the *Legend*'s structural anticipation of the 'Retraction' serve simply to ironize or trivialize it, to function as a 'mythological dress rehearsal for the realities of medieval Christianity', as one critic has suggested?[26] Should the 'Retraction' then be read merely as self-advertisement or even veiled self-justification on Chaucer's part? I suggest that the answer lies in a preoccupation of Chaucerian palinodes that has not been adequately considered: the thematic importance of competing models of authorship (the human and the divine), their potential for cooperation, and their connection to the issue of authorial responsibility. Perhaps the most interesting point of intersection between the *Legend* Prologue and the 'Retraction' is the treatment of their *dramatis personae*: in the former, Chaucer as author, the God of Love as judge (heavily imbued with qualities associated with the Christian God), and Alceste as mediatrix; in the latter, Chaucer as author, the Christian God as judge (though 'off stage'), and the reader, to whom the prayer is addressed, as mediator ('Wherfore I biseke yow mekely, for the mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me . . .' [*CT* X.1084]). In order

the 'Retraction', and compares it on that level to Chaucer's multivalent style elsewhere in his poetry (*Chaucer's Poetics*, pp. 171–2).

23 R. Boenig, 'Taking Leave: Chaucer's Retraction and the Ways of Affirmation and Negation', *Studia Mystica* 12 (1989), 21–8.

24 Travis, 'Deconstructing', 135–58; cf. R.P. McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville, FL, 1998), pp. 131–53.

25 Obermeier, *History and Anatomy*, p. 212.

26 Obermeier, *History and Anatomy*, p. 219.

adequately to characterize Chaucer's motives in pairing the *Legend* Prologue and the 'Retraction', and their implications for our interpretation of the latter in particular, we must turn to the question of the relationship between the author and God which Chaucer imagines here. This brings us to the work which stands most problematically behind, and in certain ways haunts, both the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* and the 'Retraction': *Troilus and Criseyde.*

Who Wrote the Book of Love?

Beyond its condemnation in both of Chaucer's later palinodes, *Troilus* invites comparison with the *Legend* and the 'Retraction' for at least two reasons. First, the *Troilus* contains its own 'palinode', an ending which can be seen as the originary, and perhaps inspirational, retraction from which the other two draw force and meaning.[27] Second, the *Troilus* contains within its narrative universe both the courtly perspective of the *Legend* and the Christian one of the 'Retraction'; indeed, the *Troilus* not only encapsulates but thematizes the very motion of transfer from the God of Love to love of God which characterizes the problematic relationship between the two palinodes under consideration in this essay. The so-called epilogue of the *Troilus* features an evaluation and rejection of the praise of earthly love that has formed the substance of the poem; it represents an enlightened rewriting of the opening stanzas of the poem by celebrating the true God of Love, the true Heaven, and the true way to advance our souls. The shameless paronomasia of my title, in fact, is drawn from the oily rhetoric of Diomede's first speech to Criseyde: 'O god of Love in soth we serven bothe. / And for the love of God, my lady fre, / Whomso ye hate, as beth nat wroth with me' (*Tr* 5.143–5).

But it is kinds of authorship, more than kinds of love, which concern us here. If in the Prologue to the *Legend* we witnessed a 'god' evaluating and directing the writing of a human author, in the epilogue of the *Troilus* we are

[27] J.M. Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter:* Troilus *and the Apotheosis Tradition* (Berkeley, 1972), pp. 154–5, compares the end of the *Troilus* with the 'Retraction' and concludes that, while they share a condemnation of 'worldly vanities', the end of *Troilus* is not, properly speaking, a retraction because it does not explicitly withdraw what it rejects. Further, according to Steadman, the fact that the critique of the mutability of worldly values has been an implicit theme of *Troilus* all along prevents the palinodic ending from carrying the force of revocation. Steadman does not acknowledge, however, that the 'Retraction' is not altogether dissimilar from the end of *Troilus* on this note: it, too, attempts to unwrite works which, while worldly in subject matter, often critiqued worldliness in their style of presentation (including *Troilus* itself); it, too, confounds the distance between secular literature's capacity to morally instruct (i.e., through negative example; cf. *LGW* F 470–4) and the moral necessity of rejecting secular literature itself.

also confronted with a complex negotiation of what in medieval scholastic theory was known as the *duplex causa efficiens*, the idea that books – especially the Bible, but also secular writings – are produced by the collaboration between human authors and God, the *auctor* of all things.[28] If, in the *Legend* Prologue, Chaucer's use of the palinode convention allowed him to affirm his authorship – by invoking his authorial intention and assuming responsibility for his works as a response to their misunderstanding – the epilogue of the *Troilus* and the 'Retraction', while in obvious respects more 'serious', similarly allude to the literary/moral interactions between God and the human author in a way that empowers Chaucer to claim at least a limited status of authorship for himself. In both *Troilus* and the 'Retraction', it is the issue of Chaucer's sense of responsibility before God which prompts his assertion of authorship, and it is the motion of retraction – an *undoing* of the already-written – which paradoxically enables Chaucer to confront the powers of his own creation, in a world circumscribed by other and greater creators, with an assertiveness of which Chaucer is usually not thought capable. The *Legend* Prologue, which treats these serious theoretical and moral issues at a comic remove, can therefore help us both to recognize and interpret Chaucer's expression of the nature of authorship and responsibility in his other, more problematic palinodes.

A.J. Minnis's seminal study of the theories of authorship expressed in medieval scholastic prologues shows that the rise of scholasticism in the thirteenth century ushered in a shift from the older notion of the divine *auctor* as essentially responsible for human writings, man being a mere conduit for God's *auctoritas*, to a new interest in the literary and moral activity of the human *auctor* as a sort of co-conspirator with God, the prime *auctor*. Minnis further shows that fourteenth-century literary artists took up where commentators and theologians left off, and both adopted and exploited these conventions of academic prefaces to describe, defend, and orient their activity as writers. A poet like Gower in *Vox Clamantis* could thus use the topos of the *duplex causa efficiens*, the relation between the creative activity of God and himself, to glorify the utility of his work by claiming its divine patronage, all the while sheltering himself from blatant presumption behind the veil of humility afforded by the topos. An oblique claim of authorship could thus be balanced with deference to authority.[29] On the other hand, the *duplex causa efficiens* also absorbed the longstanding convention of attributing any good in one's work to God, and any errors to oneself. This convention can be found, for example, in Augustine's *De Trinitate* and *Retractations*; the latter states that mortals should strive to faithfully reproduce and communicate the

[28] On the *duplex causa efficiens*, see A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1984), pp. 79–80.

[29] Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, pp. 172–4.

teaching of God, the one true Teacher: 'They give offense, however, not when they repeat His words at length, but when they add their own; for in this way, they fall from loquacity into falsehood.'[30] Of more immediate interest, Boccaccio also attributes all wisdom in his *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* to God Himself,[31] and Chaucer follows this pattern in his 'Retraction': if the reader likes anything in his 'litel tretys', says Chaucer, then should they 'therof . . . thanken oure Lord Jhesu Crist, of whom procedeth al wit and al goodnesse' (*CT* X.1081). But Boccaccio was also able to subvert this same convention in the *Decameron*, in a passage Chaucer may not have known but which nonetheless bears obvious resemblances to Chaucer's authorial stance in the *Canterbury Tales*: here, Boccaccio insists that he was only the faithful scribe of the stories in his collection, which we know were his own inventions, and that any imperfections should be attributed to the tellers of the stories, not him: 'But even if one could assume that I was the inventor as well as the scribe of these stories (which was not the case), I still insist that I would not feel ashamed if some fell short of perfection, for there is no craftsman other than God whose work is whole and faultless in every respect.'[32] Boccaccio thus uses the concept of God's authorship to release himself from responsibility for the general insufficiencies of his work and to conflate willful roguery with natural human imperfection, all the while suggesting, in Minnis's words, that his 'creativity parallels . . . the perfect creation of God'.[33]

Minnis's study also shows the extent to which Chaucer exploited the conceptual vocabulary of medieval scholastic theory to insulate himself from the claims and responsibilities of authorship which the Italian humanists embraced and which one of his contemporaries in England, Gower, had even begun to claim for the English vernacular. Instead, Chaucer adopts, with much disingenuousness, the poses of translator and compiler, respectively, in writing *Troilus* and the *Canterbury Tales*. The Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women*, as Percival has shown, also creatively absorbs the design of academic prologues, which share with the *Legend* an interest in the concept of *intentio auctoris* and the definition of *auctoritas* (balanced in the *Legend* against the characters' competing understandings of *translatio*).[34] In the *Legend*, Chaucer not only owns up to but defends his original authorial contributions; at the end of *Troilus* and in the 'Retraction', Chaucer similarly

30 St Augustine, *The Retractations*, trans. Sr M. I. Bogan, The Fathers of the Church 60 (Washington, DC, 1968) 4–5.

31 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's* Genealogia Deorum Gentilium, trans. C.G. Osgood (Princeton, 1930), p. 142.

32 Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam (New York, 1972), p. 831.

33 Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, pp. 203–4.

34 Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women*, pp. 130–48.

removes his mask and avows responsibility for his literary productions in the manner of a self-acknowledged *auctor* – in the former, by aligning his poem with 'the forme of olde clerkis speche' (*Tr* 5.1854) and placing it in the company of 'Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace' (5.1792); and in the latter, by acknowledging that the ribaldry of the Miller, among others, is a sin that was not innocently witnessed but manufactured and indulged.

But at the same time as Chaucer claims at least a limited status of authorship for himself in the epilogue of *Troilus*, he inscribes, almost as if by secret code, the image of God as true *auctor*:

> Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So sende myght to make in som comedye!
> But litel book, no makyng thow n'envie,
> But subgit be to alle poesye;
> And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace
> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace. (*Tr* 5.1786–92)

In this famous stanza – which, as Renate Haas has shown, is thick with 'classicizing' rhetoric and vocabulary[35] – Chaucer's meditations on the prospect that he will 'make in som comedye' and his situation of himself as 'makere' amidst other 'makyng' as well as 'poesye', are interwoven with the phrase 'God thi makere' in line 1787. The literal sense of lines 1787–88, phrased as an address to the book, expresses the hope that God will send your (the book's) maker the power, *myght*, to compose a comedy.[36] However, the convoluted syntax makes it impossible not to think at first that 'God thi makere' – that is, God, the maker of the book, as opposed to Chaucer, the maker of the book – as a phrase forms the subject of the sentence.[37] It is significant that in nearly all of Chaucer's uses of the word 'maker' elsewhere in

35 See R. Haas, 'A Note on *TC* V.1786–92', *Florilegium* 10 (1988–91), 93–8.

36 This forms one of several parallels with the opening scene of *Troilus*, in which similar language is applied to the God of Love: 'And ek for me preieth to God so dere / That I have *myght* to shewe, in som manere, / Swich peyne and wo as Loves folk endure' (I.32–34; my italics). Here again we see the same duality of imagery that we find when placing the scenes of divine judgment in the *Legend* and the 'Retraction' next to one another.

37 A. Middleton, 'Chaucer's "New Men" and the Good of Literature in the *Canterbury Tales*', in *Literature and Society: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1978*, ed. E.W. Said, n.s. 3 (Baltimore, 1980), pp. 15–56, at pp. 34–8, notes how the use of 'make' words here 'generate[s] ghosts of interfering readings', including the momentary confusion of God's and Chaucer's 'makyng.' See also R.C. Boys, 'An Unusual Meaning of "Make" in Chaucer', *MLN* 52 (1937), 351–53, and cf. Haas: 'Very indirectly, Chaucer thus seems to play on the analogy between divine and poetic creation, with which the early humanists strived to elevate classical poetry and their own' ('Note', p. 95). Note that 'makyng' is also an important linguistic preoccupation of the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women*: see F 74, F 364, F 413, F 417, F 483, etc.

his writings, as well as in one of the two other appearances of the word in *Troilus* (3.1437), it describes *God as maker* of world and man; it should be noted that one of the few instances where it does not, though perhaps scribal, is the rubric to the 'Retraction': 'Heere taketh the *makere* of this book his leve' [my italics].[38] The image of God as true maker of Chaucer's book, or perhaps as maker of the book's maker,[39] permeates the remainder of the *Troilus* epilogue: first, when the language of the exhortation turns explicitly to God seven stanzas later, Chaucer instructs the poem's readers to cast their eyes upon 'thilke God that after his ymage / Yow *made*' (*Tr* 5.1839; my italics); second, when Chaucer presents his book not just to Gower and Strode, but to 'that sothfast Crist' for correction (*Tr* 5.1860); and finally, in the emphatic position of the verb in the conspicuous syntax of the penultimate line, 'So *make* us, Jesus, for thi mercy, digne,' itself a reprise of the narrator's address to Venus in the proem of Book 3, 'And as yow list, ye maken hertes digne' (*Tr* 5.1868, 3.23; my italics). What we have here, then, is a kind of authorial 'signature', a literary signpost that forms part of the discursive system described by Anne Middleton in her analysis of late medieval authorial self-making, in which the 'inwoven name of the author becomes, within the literary situation in which it is displayed . . . the sign under which the "menyng" (intent) of the work is declared and made coextensive with the "intente" of the author.'[40] Rather than embedding an image of his own authorial identity into the texture of these last stanzas, however, Chaucer threads across them an affirmation of the necessary duality of authorship, the idealized balance between his own artistic creation and the source of that creation in God. In sum, then, Chaucer presents himself in the *Troilus*, explicitly and implicitly, as both translator of previous *auctores* and as scribe of God, but he brackets this image with an affirmation of his own authorial responsibility as it pertains to both his human and his divine sources. The senses of 'God thi makere' and 'God [overseeing] thi makere' are married in a single phrase. It is this slippage between Chaucer's affirmation of his own powers of authorship and the direction of an inspiring God which dramatically connects the epilogue of *Troilus* with the Prologue of the *Legend*; in the latter, however, the relationship that the *Troilus* presents as idealized is treated parodically, with the God of Love not only misunderstanding the nature of Chaucer's responsibility for his poetic works, but forcing him to take respon-

38 Cf. Haas, 'Note', p. 95.

39 Cf. P. Pulsiano, 'Redeemed Language and the Ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*, ed. J.N. Wasserman and L. Roney (Syracuse, NY, 1989), pp. 153–74, at p. 156.

40 A. Middleton, 'William Langland's "Kynde Name": Authorial Signature and Social Identity in Late Fourteenth-Century England', in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530*, ed. L. Patterson (Berkeley, 1990), pp. 15–82, at p. 30.

sibility (i.e., perform penance) by 'translating' the deity's laughably inadequate literary doctrines into human language.

Chaucer's formulation of his authorial responsibility vis à vis God's inspiration at the end of the *Troilus* invites closer examination as a context for his other palinodes and, specifically, the relationship between vocation and re-vocation they so problematically evince. Indeed, traces of this vision of dual authorship pervade the imaginative design of the *Troilus* epilogue, though they have largely been overlooked by the poem's critics. The logic of Chaucer's arrangement of the epilogue stanzas, for example, has puzzled many readers,[41] but one function served by Chaucer's interweaving of the sending off of his book with the action of the narrative proper is that our attention is called to the parallel journeys of book and protagonist, and hence the parallel actions of the divine and human authors. Troilus journeys to meet his Maker even as the book in which he figured is sent off by its maker. Both Troilus and the book will endure a process of refining and purification: Troilus in the unearthly air; the book by passing through the purgatory of its betters, the poets on the steps, and by the correction of Gower and Strode. When we consider the manuscript tradition that names the poem 'The Book of Troilus' and Chaucer's own reference to his work simply as 'Troylus' in his poem to Adam Scriveyn, we better appreciate the sense in which Troilus *is*, quite literally, the book. Here, the distance is again blurred between God the maker of Troilus and Chaucer the maker of the book of Troilus. Within the book itself, too, Chaucer as narrator repeatedly reminds us that he possesses prescience about the outcome of the narrative, within which he must watch his characters fulfill their literary fates, much as God enjoys non-deterministic foresight of human actions. The work of Chaucer and of God as makers again appears to be in harmony.

I have just invoked the metaphor of death and afterlife for the motion of Chaucer's book, but the image of birth is perhaps still more appropriate. The affectionate adjective 'litel' in 'Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye', the tenderness of which paradoxically spills over into the '*litel* spot of erthe' that is harshly rejected four stanzas later, signals us to a father–child relationship between Chaucer and his book (compare Chaucer's address to '*Lyte* Lowys my sone' in the prologue to the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* [my italics]). In the *Troilus* epilogue, the book is, as it were, a newborn infant struggling to crawl up those mighty steps without injuring itself, urged on by its father. Perhaps, in the alignment of 'litel bok' and 'litel spot of erthe', we are to see the poet behind his work, the former, as we are to see God through the created world, the latter. Is it irony or something more when, in the 'Retraction', this very 'book of Troilus' will be rejected as unflinchingly as is the 'litel spot of

41 See especially W. Kamowski, 'A Suggestion for Emending the Epilogue of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Chaucer Review* 21 (1987), 405–17.

erthe' in the epilogue of the book itself? In any case, the image of the birth of Chaucer's book ironically parallels the motion of Troilus's death. If I may be allowed a fanciful image, the book may also be viewed as the 'child' of Troilus' and Criseyde's fruitless love affair, and the 'Retraction' suggests that the *style* of the book – despite its *sentence*, and despite indeed the rejection of worldly vanity contained in its epilogue – partakes of the sins of its parents, too much immersed in love of earthly beauty. Within the space of the epilogue itself, Troilus and Chaucer's book together stand to judgment – the one by God, the other by readers.

This image at the end of *Troilus* of Chaucer fathering his book runs counter to A.C. Spearing's influential characterization of Chaucer's dominant attitude toward authorship as one of resistance to a position of paternal authority.[42] Drawing upon Roland Barthes, Spearing has argued that Chaucer aimed to produce 'texts', not 'works' – that is, de-authorized sites of linguistic interplay as opposed to products fixed by 'a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God)' in which the author acts as 'the father and the owner of his work'.[43] Chaucer's fifteenth-century readers, according to Spearing, thrust upon him a paternal role which he had critiqued and resisted in his own writings. However, in the epilogue of *Troilus*, I want to suggest, Chaucer concerns himself quite seriously with issues of paternity and authority, and assumes the role of father figure to his book precisely because of his sense of responsibility before God for what he himself has produced. Chaucer's very recognition of his authority, we might even say his independence, as director of his work is simultaneously caught up in his awareness of his own humble, childish dependence on God, his father and maker, whose image he bears. Being a father of his work, Chaucer is reminded that he is the child of a greater Father, but, paradoxically, it is only in acknowledging one's status as a child – like the Prioress in her Prologue – that one acts morally like an adult.[44]

[42] A.C. Spearing, 'Father Chaucer', in *Writing After Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century*, ed. D.J. Pinti (New York, 1998), pp. 145–66 (originally published, with minor differences, in A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* [Cambridge, 1985], pp. 88–110). Indeed, most scholars who emphasize Chaucer's resistance to claims of *auctoritas* marginalize his palinodes as exceptional, conventional, or irrelevant to what they see as his characteristic authorial stance. For viewpoints similar to Spearing's, see A.J. Minnis, '*De vulgari auctoritate*: Chaucer, Gower and the Men of Great Authority', in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R.F. Yeager, ELS Monograph Series 51 (Victoria, BC, 1991), pp. 36–74, and S. Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 57–84.

[43] R. Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath (London, 1977), quoted in Spearing, 'Father Chaucer', p. 159.

[44] Cf. J. Mann, 'Parents and Children in the "Canterbury Tales" ', in *Literature in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. P. Boitani and A. Torti (Tübingen and Cambridge, 1983), pp. 165–83 for a cogent argument that Chaucer's portrayals of parent/child rela-

In the *Troilus* epilogue, then, Chaucer ultimately exploits the idea of himself as the maker of his book in order to direct us to God, our maker and *auctor* of all things. In so doing, he resists the common manipulations of the *duplex causa efficiens* topos either to glorify one's own work by aligning it with God's perfect creation or to relieve oneself of responsibility for what one has in fact authorized. In his level-headed way, Chaucer recognized that God both inspires and judges, spanning the line from creation to apocalypse: in between lie the work, play, and responsibility of the human *auctor*. In his 'Retraction', with God's judgment on his mind, Chaucer paradoxically affirms his authorship – something he has been playfully obfuscating throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, as Minnis has shown, by posing as a compiler – in the very motion of wishing he had never authored anything, that God had never surrendered his divine pen. Here, Chaucer's sense of responsibility manifests in his *calling back* his books rather than sending them off. In the 'Retraction', Chaucer evaluates the question of his responsibility for the 'litel tretys' (if we take this to refer to the *Canterbury Tales*) and the 'worldly vanitees' he has produced, and plans to fill the rest of his life with penitence; in *Troilus* the concerns are a 'litel bok' and, again, 'worldly vanyte' (*Tr* 5.1837) and there Chaucer hopes to fill his days with the writing of a comedy 'er that he dye' (much as, in the *Legend*, Chaucer is to devote the 'moste partye' of the remainder of his life atoning for his earlier writings through different kinds of writing [F 482]). Unlike the 'Retraction', the *Troilus* epilogue is not restrictive of future (or past) poetic efforts, but it is, I suggest, similarly concerned with the project of defining authorial responsibility in the context of the symmetry of divine and human authorship.

The *Legend of Good Women*, then, with its carnivalesque scenario of a tyrannical deity who, in his capacity as the God of Love and in his belief that his rule is co-extensive with that of the Christian God, embodies the very confusion of moral priorities which the end of *Troilus* and the 'Retraction' so profoundly critique, acts as a 'shadow-text' in its own right to Chaucer's other, more weighty palinodes. In the terms of the *duplex causa efficiens* topos, the God of Love in the *Legend* is a divine author who, far from inspiring Chaucer, *exploits* him by commissioning him as the unwilling scribe of his own narrow-mindedness. The distance between the God of Love's oppressive relationship with Chaucer and the idealized representation of the *duplex causa efficiens* in the epilogue of *Troilus* only serves to reinforce the superiority of the level of poetic awareness which the *Legend* attempts to undo, along with the invalidity of the God of Love's easy, Diomede-like equation of the service he demands with love of God.

But if the epilogue of *Troilus* provides an essential context for the

tionships (Mann does not consider Chaucer's own authorial stance) usually point beyond the human level to express the larger relationship between God and his children.

palinodic impulse of the *Legend*, the *Legend* and the *Troilus* together cast their shadows over the ultimate imagined meeting between Chaucer and his maker in the 'Retraction'. If Chaucer did indeed intend in the 'Retraction' to fix his authorial intention and hence the promise of God's mercy for his sins, the history of criticism would imply that he failed tragically. Instead, I suggest, Chaucer returns in the 'Retraction' for the third time to the literary project of formulating the relationship among his own authorial responsibility, the inspiration and destination of his works in God, and the power of readers to construe and create meaning. But the precedent of the *Legend* hints that Chaucer's concern in the 'Retraction' involves not only the perils of his audience's misreading of his works, but the possibility of God's misreading of his intentions.[45] A reader would have to be as literal-minded as the God of Love to suppose that the *Troilus* or the *Book of the Duchess*, for example, simply trumpet the pleasures of earthly love; both, after all, thematize the inevitability of loss and the promise of Boethian and Christian transcendence of worldly mutability. Are we to believe that Chaucer in the 'Retraction' has forgotten not only the titles of some of his own works (*CT* X.1087) but his own defense of fiction's capacity to combine moral edification with the portrayal of secular delights: 'Algate, God woot, yt was myn entente / To forthren trouthe in love and yt cheryce, / And to ben war fro falsnesse and from vice / By swich ensample; this was my menynge' (*LGW* F 471–74)? Or does Chaucer withdraw from the solution offered by 'Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine' because of his prior experience with a god who 'wol nat countrepleted be / In right ne wrong' (*LGW* F 476–77)? The God of Love does not recognize that Chaucer did not intend in the *Troilus* to deride women or love itself, whatever his sources might have intended; the Christian God of the 'Retraction', Chaucer implies, may not recognize that Chaucer in fact critiqued 'worldly vanitees' implicitly throughout the *Troilus* and explicitly in its Christian epilogue. If Chaucer's authorship is marked in these paradoxical ways by an awareness of his accountability, therefore, we as readers are equally implicated in the game of judgment – a game in which, Chaucer implies, God as reader (as opposed to author) may too have his limitations.

45 Cf. J.M. Cox, 'Toward Vernacular Humor', *Virginia Quarterly Review* 46 (1970), 311–30: '[Chaucer's] retraction is surely a last joke – one which, leaving God the problem of censoring those tales which tend toward sin, parallels his earlier joke of leaving his readers the responsibility of censoring the *fabliaux*' (p. 315).

8

Games Medieval Women Play

NICOLA MCDONALD

Demande: Quel difference trouvez vous d'un porcel a ung vit?
Reponse: Ung pourceau au froter et grater se couche, et ung vit se lieve.[1]

Question: What is the difference between a piglet and a penis?
Answer: When you stroke and tickle a piglet, it goes to sleep, but a penis wakes up.

In two of the extant manuscripts of the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer's famously equivocal poem is bound up with some of the rare surviving English evidence for a kind of amorously inflected social game that was popular in élite society in late medieval Europe.[2] Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS Fairfax 16 and Bodley 638, dating from the mid to the late fifteenth century, bear eloquent testimony to the construction of a corpus of fashionable, courtly verse that is at once Chaucerian (with emphasis on his shorter or occasional poems) and derivative of Chaucer and the most well known of his French, as well as English, near contemporaries.[3] Copied almost fifty years apart, the manuscripts demonstrate the persistence of a distinctively late medieval taste for courtly verse, as well as the kind of ludic diversions that would almost certainly accompany its reading; and they further indicate the dissemination of that taste among a wider, albeit still privileged, audi-

1 *Amorous Games: A Critical Edition of Les Advineaux Amoureux*, ed. J.W. Hassell, Jr. (Austin, Texas, 1974), p. 168, no. 733. See also B. Roy, *Devinettes françaises du moyen âge* (Montreal, 1977), p. 153, no. 476.

2 All citations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. L.D. Benson (Oxford, 1988).

3 Fairfax 16 is commonly dated to c. 1440; Bodley 638 was copied closer to the end of the fifteenth century, c. 1475–1500. Both manuscripts are available in facsimile: *Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 16*, with an introduction by J. Norton-Smith (London, 1979) and *Manuscript Bodley 638: A Facsimile*, with an introduction by Pamela Robinson (Norman, OK, 1982). See M.C. Seymour's review of the Fairfax 16 facsimile for some cautionary remarks on Norton-Smith's interpretation of evidence, *The Library*, n.s. 4 (1982), 432–3.

ence.[4] The purposeful organization in these anthologies of texts like *Ragman Roll*[5] and *Chaunce of Dice*,[6] the two erotically charged games that the manuscripts uniquely preserve,[7] alongside other explicitly ludic amorous verse – complaints submitted to Cupid's parliament, Valentine's Day verses, poems in praise of the flower and the leaf, Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, and, of course, the *Legend* with its playful F Prologue – points suggestively to an erotic social exchange that animated fashionable, late medieval circles and their fifteenth-century imitators.[8]

My purpose here is not to articulate the way in which manuscript context

4 Fairfax 16 bears the arms of the Stanleys of Hooton; its first owner is commonly identified as John Stanley Esq. (d. 1469), a member of the Cheshire gentry with close affiliations to the royal court where he served as Usher of the Chamber from 1440 to 1455 (his biographer writes that, despite holding land in Wales, it is 'not clear that he was ever long away from court', see J.C. Wedgwood, *Histories of Parliament: Biographies of the Commons House 1439–1509* [London, 1936], pp. 797–9, at p. 798); see further Norton-Smith's introduction to his facsimile *Fairfax 16*. The manuscript is indicative of 'courtly' reading tastes in the middle of the fifteenth century and of the place of Chaucer and his disciples, as well as amorously inflected social games, in the construction of a fashionable and literate élite. Bodley 638, copied nearer the end of the century, cannot so easily be identified with a single medieval owner, but Robinson argues that, like Fairfax 16, it seems 'specifically designed to appeal to a member of the gentry who might wish to participate in the courtly "game of love" '; an altogether less distinguished, cheaper production it bears testament to the importance of anthologies like this to 'those who aspired to the social and literary refinements of the day' (see Robinson's introduction to *Bodley 638*, pp. xvii, xxxv).

5 *Ragman Roll: Ein spätmittelenglishes Gedicht*, ed. Andreas Freudenberger (Erlangen, 1909) provides a facing-page edition of both the Fairfax 16 and Bodley 638 texts; all citations are from the earlier Fairfax version. The Fairfax 16 version of *Ragman Roll* is also available in T. Wright, *Anecdota Literaria* (London, 1844), pp. 83–88.

6 E.P. Hammond, 'The Chaunce of Dice', *Englische Studien* 59 (1925), 1–16, edits the Fairfax 16 version of the text; all citations are from this edition.

7 A single stanza of *Ragman Roll* is extant in another mid fifteenth-century manuscript, London, British Library MS Additional 36983, where it functions independently as a comic lyric.

8 John Stevens' account of fashionable entertainment among the late medieval courtly élite remains seminal (*Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* [London, 1961], pp. 147–229) as does Richard F. Green's discussion of the culture of amorous play at both the Ricardian and French courts: 'The *Familia Regis* and the *Familia Cupidinis*', in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. V.J. Scattergood and J.W. Sherborne (London, 1983), pp. 87–108. For a more recent account of just one aspect of courtly play, the ritual of Maying, see 'Maytime in Late Medieval Courts' in S. Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 39–72. Crane argues that the courtly May rituals of the later fourteenth century witness an attempt to sublimate and 'constrain', particularly female, sexuality that is distinct from the 'licence and informality' that characterizes earlier and more popular manifestations of Maying (see especially pp. 46–8, 58); the licence that she finds missing remains prominent in the kinds of sexualized games, played in private and intimate circles, that I chart here; our readings of the sexual poetics of the *Legend* are accordingly divergent.

promotes a reading of the *Legend* as a fashionable game, written for an intimate court audience of Ricardian women and men at a springtime or other festive occasion, nor to demonstrate that it was understood as just such a game well beyond its original 'performance'.[9] Florence Percival and Alastair Minnis have already, and convincingly, detailed the case for the *Legend* as a courtly diversion.[10] Likewise, I have elsewhere examined the way in which the poem, especially when prefaced by the earlier F Prologue, speaks to a predominantly female audience; and I have identified an informal group of women in and around the Ricardian court with the right kind of interests and experience to appreciate, and participate in, the *Legend* as a ludic interlude.[11] Chaucer's pitiful women and serially unfaithful men, whose epic indiscretions are recounted by a sly and partisan narrator ('trusteth, as in love, no man but me' [2561]), are undoubtedly designed to promote the knowing laughter, and perhaps knowing blush, of social intimates, women and men. Instead, what I want to do here is tease out the implications of games like *Ragman Roll*, *Chaunce of Dice* and analogous social pastimes for a fuller understanding of the pleasures and proclivities of the élite medieval women who, in all likelihood, comprised the *Legend*'s audience. These games, pre-

9 The most thorough account of the *Legend* as a performance piece is William A. Quinn, *Chaucer's Rehersynges: The Performability of the Legend of Good Women* (Washington, 1994); see also Quinn's essay in the present volume.

10 F. Percival, 'The Legend as Courtly Game', in *Chaucer's Legendary* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 299–323; A. Minnis, 'The World Upside Down: Gender Game as Alternative Art', in *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 443–54. Green's earlier article 'The *Familia Regis*', details the extent to which amorous games played a key role in aristocratic socializing and includes a short discussion of the *Legend*. Both David Wallace and Andrew Taylor locate the *Legend* at the centre of the Ricardian court, although neither is interested in its status as a game. See D. Wallace, 'Anne of Bohemia, Queen of England, and Chaucer's *Emperice*', *Litterature Pragensia: Studies in Literature and Culture* 5 (1995), 1–16; 'Legends and Lives of Good Women', *Chaucerian Polity: Absolute Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 337–78; and A. Taylor, 'Anne of Bohemia and the Making of Chaucer', *SAC* 19 (1997), 95–119.

11 Nicola McDonald, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Ladies at Court and the Female Reader', *Chaucer Review* 35 (2000), 22–42. This essay builds on that earlier work but, in my reconsideration of the tastes and interests of the women who had access to, and no doubt used, the *Legend*'s manuscripts, it also represents a departure from it. My earlier interest in the female reader, as evidenced by the manuscripts, focused on those bourgeois women whom we associate with the more heterogeneous manuscript compilations, commonly called household books (Cambridge, Trinity College, R.3.19 and Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6, the so-called Findern anthology); here my focus is on manuscripts (and the women who used them) that are demonstrably more courtly and fashionable. This essay then serves to nuance my earlier conclusions, to demonstrate that the sexual licence I found evident in Ricardian circles persists, in the élite milieu at least, well into the fifteenth century, and to underscore the complex nature of medieval women's experiences and of the conclusions about that experience that we can draw from what is always fragmentary evidence.

served only haphazardly and, like the textual residue of most informal play, in a way that renders incomplete our understanding of how they really work, offer a productive space in which we can think about real women, in real social situations, precisely because of their apparent inconsequentiality. The tastes, as well as the desires, of medieval women are remote to us and in many ways irrevocably lost; but one thing we can be certain of is that they were as complex and contradictory – as multiple, surprising and unfathomable – as our own. The aim of this essay is to 'touch', to borrow Carolyn Dinshaw's provocative term,[12] something of the fullness, the complexity of these women's lives, as well as of the culture that shapes and is in turn shaped by them. I do so by interrogating a body of material that, because it is both inescapably *outré* and insistently equivocal, challenges at every turn the orthodoxies, medieval as well as modern, that inform our stereotypes of medieval women.

I will begin by examining in some detail *Ragman Roll* and *Chaunce of Dice*, their structure, content and distinctive aesthetic, before turning to the broader context, French as well as English, from which these amorous games emerge. The analogous material is rich and richly suggestive, but I have confined myself to the so-called *demandes d'amour* (the vast genre of questions and answers about love) and the other ludic material with which they circulate. Like the games of chance, the *demandes* foster erotically charged social interaction and are conventionally located in the same kind of élite and fashionable circles; they are found not only on the continent, but in English manuscripts and in English. In addition, I want finally to suggest another kind of ludic material that shares its textual strategies as well as subject-matter with the courtly games: with further research, the fabliaux, like the games discussed here, will undoubtedly provide an important resource for a better understanding of élite medieval women's apparently unorthodox, or at least under-appreciated, tastes. Most, if not all, of the games I examine here are, from all available evidence, intended for mixed social occasions (although some, like *Ragman Roll*, are addressed exclusively to women) and they usually depend on a mixed gender dynamic, and the erotic tension that mix generates, to operate successfully. Although I analyse the two English games (and analogous French material) in detail, and

12 C. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC, 1999); see especially the introduction, 'Touching on the Past', pp. 1–54. While Dinshaw's project is an explicitly queer one – to make connections between 'lives, texts and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then' and 'left out of current sexual categories now' (p. 1) – it effectively challenges medievalists to forge continuities between ourselves and medieval texts and cultures; it invites us to collide unashamedly our own modern insights and obsessions with the remnants of our past in ways that destabilize our easy certainties about both then and now, them and us.

demonstrate the way in which they reward scholarly attention, my interest, throughout this essay, is explicitly in the women who played them and in what we can learn from them about women's leisure habits and cultural tastes. A curious feature of all of the research on this material to date is its insistent lack of interest in, its resistance to, what the games, their subject-matter and implied social dynamic, can tell us about the women who played and, we may assume, enjoyed them.[13] I do not want to give these ephemeral pastimes a prominence that they do not merit, but they can provide, where so many other extant texts cannot, traces of women's lives that are not, any more than men's, all piety and prayer. And a final proviso: I am, of course, talking about how women functioned in an explicitly ludic framework; in other words, in a social (and here verbal) arena that is purposefully structured to allow certain kinds of behaviour that elsewhere might not only be discouraged but explicitly prohibited. Yet, everything we know about games suggests the extent to which they are not simply at the margins of social experience but fundamental to our socialization and our selves.[14]

Ragman Roll and *Chaunce of Dice* are among the very few society games (or *jeux de société* as the French call them) that survive in English from the late Middle Ages. To date, they have received no sustained critical attention and, with the exception of Florence Percival, who likewise notes that they are at once 'effusively laudatory' and 'scurrilously rude', real analysis has been limited to editorial conundrums.[15] Significantly, however, both Percival and Francis Lee Utley, who lists *Ragman Roll* in his vast 'matter of women' index, derive from these games (albeit only in passing) general principles of courtly, in particular women's, entertainment: they 'illustrate the range of tone, from courtly to obscenely comic, possible in a lady's bower or baronial hall'.[16] It is precisely this ludic 'tone' and its implications, for our under-

13 Squeamishness, if not a downright refusal to articulate or see sexually explicit content, characterizes much scholarship on the games. In '*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment* and Aristocratic Courtship', in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, ed. K. Busby and E. Kooper (Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 211–25, R.F. Green, whose analysis is otherwise exemplary, banishes the more risqué material to the endnotes (see p. 224, nn. 30 and 31) even though his point is lost without it. More remarkable is L.C. Brooks, who in a study of the main fifteenth century repositories of the French *demandes d'amour* (a popular ludic genre discussed below), insists that 'to look for any conscious sexual symbolism in these questions and answers would probably be out of place', 'The *Demandes d'Amour* of the Chantilly and Wolfenbüttel Manuscripts', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 23 (1997), 223–235, at p. 231.

14 The classic accounts of the social significance of games are J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London, 1949; first published in Dutch 1938) and Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York, 1961; first published in French 1958). On games, see also in this volume, Betsy McCormick, chapter 5.

15 Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary*, p. 319.

16 Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib* (New York, 1970; first published 1944), p. 201; see also Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary*, p. 321.

standing of the social as well as erotic world in which élite medieval women circulated, that I will explore below. The relative paucity of such English evidence, particularly in contrast to that which survives in French, has tended to reinforce assumptions about cultural difference (French social extravagance and sexual licence are enduringly opposed to English restraint) that, given what we know about the dynamic cultural exchange between England and France in the late Middle Ages and of the francophone nature of the English court, can scarcely be substantiated.[17] But it is the persistence of what is, I think, a cultural (rather than simply scholarly) conviction about the irremediable difference of the French, in particular in matters of social and sexual conduct, that has inhibited our appreciation of these medieval English 'love games', of their place in an international court culture, and especially of their capacity for markedly indecorous, even ribald, humour.

Writing almost half a century ago about the English courtly love lyrics, John Stevens posited a distinctive social world, marked by 'spice and piquancy', the 'saucy-solemn atmosphere' of love debate, 'half-mocking, half-serious', as the kind of social context necessary to an understanding of how the love lyric functions. Rather than being simply dull and relentlessly conventional ('hackneyed, trite, flavourless trifles'), the lyrics work instead as '*formulae*', as Stevens calls them, for social exchange.[18] They reveal whatever depth of meaning they have only in action, when they are enlivened and nuanced by being spoken aloud by real people, with real desires, in real social situations. It is in this 'saucy-solemn atmosphere' of lyric play and improvisation (the kind of play to which the lyrics in both Fairfax 16 and Bodley 638 point) that we need to locate games like *Ragman Roll* and *Chaunce of Dice*; but Stevens' conjectures about the social meaning of lyric poetry have a more important implication for our reading of the games. We, of course, only *read* them, and it is, rather, in the immediacy of play, always fragmentary and improvised, an immediacy that we can only begin to imagine, that their full potential for the instability that innuendo, verbal puns and *double entendres* hint at, is achieved. In short, then, we do a disservice to these medieval games if we do not give full rein to their ludic potential, to the way in which the words on the page have multiple and contradictory meanings that were exploited, in several different ways, in accordance with the vagaries of personal taste and the divergent demands of actual social situations.

Ragman Roll and *Chaunce of Dice* are both games of amorous divination

17 On that dynamic cultural and linguistic exchange see, most recently, A. Butterfield, 'French Culture and the Ricardian Court', in *Essays on Ricardian Literature in Honour of J.A. Burrow*, ed. A.J. Minnis, C.C.Morse and T. Turville-Petre (Oxford, 1997), pp. 82–120.

18 John Stevens, *Music and Poetry*, pp. 208, 207.

datable to the first half of the fifteenth century.[19] Each comprises a list of characters or fortunes that a player selects by means of blind choice or a chance roll of dice, respectively. In *Ragman Roll*, the players (identified as women, 'my ladyes and my maistresses echone' [1]) choose a ribbon or string ('drawith a strynge' [7]) from among the twenty-four that are attached, by means of a seal, to the twenty-four different verses that make up the game. By going to the spot to which the ribbon is attached, the player finds her character, an eight-line stanza detailing, variously, her 'lyberall' (54) 'appetitys' (51), her 'trouth' (114) and constancy, her 'gret eloquence' (138), her womanly 'shappe and beaute' (30) or, alternatively, the 'roncled face', 'shrunkyn lyppis' and 'gowuldyn teth' (66–7) that, contrary to expectation, enflame the impassioned lover who longs to see her 'hoppe' lopsidedly at a 'revell' (70). In *Chaunce of Dice*, on the other hand, the choice of fortune is determined by a roll of dice. Each player (and here they are both men and women) rolls three dice and then looks up the fortune that is allotted to the numbers rolled. Each of the fifty-six fortunes is assigned to one of the possible number combinations from 6.6.6 through to 1.1.1. The roll to which each fortune corresponds is indicated, in a diagram representing the three dice, in the margin next to the fortune. The player who rolls 5.2.2 is ridiculed for his or her outmoded fashion ('ye ben so longe fro companye' that 'yow becometh al your gere' 'as wel as cowe a sadel to bere' [254, 258–9]), while 6.3.1 offers a jab at the player's 'slouthe' and 'glotonye' (146), and 6.1.1 promises amorous success: 'the hoote desire within your hert brennynge' 'shal ye atteyne' (165, 167). *Chaunce of Dice* is additionally packed with allusions to Chaucer, not only to individual and well-known characters – 'ye kan by rote the wifes lyfe of Bathe' (298); 'now spronge ys newe Grisildes pacience' (206); 'ther is no beter pandare' (160) – but to actual lines of verse. 'There Jason falseth oon ye falsen twoo' (34) directly echoes the *Legend of Good Women* (1377) and, like similar allusions in *Ragman Roll* to 'mannys sleight' and 'flatere'(156), 'the gret vntroueth of man' (160), it underscores the extent to which a knowledge of Chaucer, as well as the kind of gender debate that the *Legend* promotes, was at the very centre of this kind of courtly play.

Although both games do include verses that celebrate conventional female virtues (grey-eyed beauty, virginity and single-minded devotion to one lover) or the pleasures of love attained, by far the majority function in a comic mode of innuendo and inversion as well occasionally as insult and mockery. Some are blatantly obscene, borrowing both their language and sentiment from the world of the fabliau. While the humour can be relatively straightforward, using allusion ('Creseyde is here' [*Dice* 379]), comic scenario (the lop-sided dancing cited above), simple inversion ('O counstaunt woman,

[19] For a survey of the popularity of divination games in the later Middle Ages, see W.L. Braekman, 'Fortune-Telling by the Casting of Dice: A Middle English Poem and its Background', *Studia Neophilologica* 52 (1980), 3–29.

stabill as the mone' [*Ragman* 113]), and insult (directed at classic lovers' faults, like bad manners, tasteless dress, as well as amorous or sexual duplicity) for its effect, others depend more on verbal dexterity, on the inherently equivocal nature of language, to turn apparently innocuous fortunes upside down. One stanza in *Ragman Roll* (81–8), for instance, details a woman's dispensing of 'compassyon' (82) to all estates. As the rich win her with extravagant gifts and the bishop with a promise of absolution, the nature of that compassion as sexual rather than spiritual starts to become clear; by the punch-line – she rewards yeomen and grooms, those familiar butts of fabliau humour, because they thrust so hard ('styfly sheyt' [88][20]) – there is no doubt that what the narrator celebrates is the lady's sexual availability. Another fabliau-inflected stanza from the same game (49–56) similarly destabilizes the primary meaning of words like 'fre', 'lyberall', 'frendly' and 'compaygnable'. A woman who runs to the tavern to quench her 'appetitys' (51) (audiences familiar with the *Legend* will have no difficulty recognising the sexual innuendo here[21]) is lauded for her 'hert fre and lyberall' (54) that permits whomsoever wants to 'thressyn' in her 'berne' (53); the final two lines of the stanza urge 'Danger' (that proverbial inhibitor of sexual congress) to learn from her, and like women, to be 'frendly' and 'compaygnable' (55–6). The use of agricultural metaphor for sexual activity ('thressyn in [her] berne') is well established in fabliaux and related verse where men plough, hoe and furrow with indubitable energy but mixed success. Here that fabliau mode signals not only the kind of interpretive strategy that the games demand (appearances are inherently misleading) but, more significantly, their adherence to a code of personal conduct and social ethics that are resolutely secular and body bound, to a world in which courtly posturing and fine sentiment is recognized for what it is: a polite, and not always very effective, cover-up – 'there was no thikkere cloth of no defense' (273) is how Chaucer puts it in the *Parliament of Fowls* – for an intense and often urgent sexual desire.

Once we understand the *modus operandi* of these games, once, in other words, we are attuned to their somatic logic and to the polyvalence of their distinctive lexicon – the familiar clichés of courtly discourse shot through with lively irreverence – we can begin to appreciate not only the social dynamic that must have animated the seasonal parties, or sociable evenings, during which they were played, but the way in which, as licit entertainment

20 See *MED*, **stflī (adv.)** 3b 'violently, with great force; fiercely, furiously; also, with strength' and **shēten (v.)** 2a 'to thrust forward, extend in some direction; thrust forth (an arm, the head); sick out (the tongue); cause (the bowels) to protrude from the rectum'.

21 In a neat inversion of the misogynist commonplace whereby womanly matter 'appetites' masculine form, Chaucer's Jason is a 'devourer and dragoun' of love, who 'apetiteth' insatiably from one form/woman to another: 'For to desyren thourgh his apetit/ To don with gentil women his delyt,/ This is his lust and his felicite' (1586–8).

for élite women, they challenge our assumptions about what constituted appropriate, or even acceptable, female conduct. Both games exploit, at every available opportunity, the freedom that the ludic mode offers to shift the players' attention to the kinds of things that, in so-called polite discourse, usually remain hidden or ignored: the nubile, and sexually available lover's body, stripped down to its basic urges, is of course prominent, but likewise monogamous, aged and even dead bodies are not spared the eroticization – by which I mean the structuring of corporeal experience as a function of amorous, or sexual, desire – that the games effect. This eroticization, though, does not simply reduce the body to the gaping holes and inflated phalluses (eager to fill them) that are the preoccupation of especially the French fabliau.[22] In *Chaunce of Dice* old age is invoked for the experience ('ye have so moche thing seen' [181]) that it can 'teche' (182) to others, and the imagined dead body ('whan youre body is leyde in graue' [269]) elicits proleptic grief for the passing of ready, and liberally dispensed, pleasure ('Than is free pitee loken and loste the keye' [270]). But equally, this time in *Ragman Roll*, the once beautiful wife, who has kept her 'chambre of prevete' (58), at once her bedroom and her genitals, for her husband alone, takes the advance of old age, and with it the wasted looks that reduce her extra-marital appeal, in her well-satisfied stride, without so much as a glance back at lost opportunity (she 'gruccheth neuer a dele' [64]).

For all of their insistence on what we might call the 'naked text' of courtly desire, these two English games do exhibit remarkably heterogeneous attitudes towards sex and courtship as well as to the different kinds of heterosexual personae available to women (as well as men). The gender neutrality of the fortunes that comprise *Chaunce of Dice* underscores the extent to which these love games are not primarily designed to delineate rigid or stereotypical patterns of social comportment.[23] As regards female sexuality, while they may reinforce restrictive roles (women, for instance, are always the barn and never the thresher), they do not simply rehearse the trite commonplaces of anti-feminist satire that render the women and their libidos diabolical. What emerges from both games, if we try to imagine them in the improvisational context of play, inflected with a distinctly ludic sense of the limits of the possible, is their remarkable malleability. Some fortunes are, of course, outrageous, urging a sexual liberation that is comic only because it is impossible. Others would satisfy even a stern moralist, but the majority play on the instability of language and thus invite divergent responses. Each player, in short,

[22] E. Jane Burns characterizes the fabliau vagina as, in the eye of the male observer, 'a mindless and silent hole begging to be filled', *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 28. See also R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliau* (Chicago, 1986), especially 'The Body and its Parts', pp. 59–100.

[23] Although some of the fortunes are gender marked, the majority are equally applicable to both sexes.

determines for herself whether to get the joke or not; each decides how, and even whether, to exploit the ludic opportunities that not only the game but different social configurations offer, depending, we must assume, on the identity and amorous interest of the other players. If the erotic tension is heightened, or if the player just has an eye for dirty detail, then the possibilities for a highly charged exchange, nuanced by tone and gesture, are endless. Virtually every stanza provides an opportunity, even if only in the suggestive emphasis of a word or in the arousal of an expectation that is immediately foreclosed, for smirks and sniggers, as well, no doubt, as disconcerting or unwanted leers.[24]

So far, I have been treating the two games as if they were interchangeable and I have suggested, implicitly, that both operate, as is common with this sort of social pastime, in that erogenous zone of mixed company, where it is the interplay between women and men that gives them their distinctive, erotically charged meaning. Writing about analogous French games from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, Richard F. Green argues that they function as a vehicle for aristocratic courtship, bringing together 'young people of both sexes' in a controlled, 'heavily chaperoned' environment that provides them with a 'degree of social, even sexual, intimacy' and that serves as a 'way of promoting desirable marriages'.[25] And, indeed, there is every reason to believe that courtship is a sufficiently distinct, and purposefully eroticized, social ritual that it makes possible kinds of behaviour that would, in different circumstances, be unimaginable. A recent study of the function of love riddles in seventeenth-century couple formation in the Lorraine region of France, albeit in a much different social group, fully corroborates Green's assumptions about the purpose of vivid sexual humour and demonstrates the longevity of the medieval games that he examines.[26] The ribald nature of these games is, according to this analysis, licensed as part of a strategy to facilitate legitimate heterosexual coupling. For all of its apparent audacity, then, the disruptive potential of the games (disruptive that is to a

[24] The erotic charge, as well as the humour, of these games lies for the most part in their decidedly equivocal lexis; the double entendres can almost always be read 'straight', while even the most seemingly innocuous verse invites, in this distinctive context, a sexual reading. One stanza in *Ragman Roll*, for instance, celebrates the lack of pride that allows a woman 'for to dele' with the 'porest wyght' and the 'gret plente' of 'good' that she dispenses 'where itt ys necessarye' (185–92); the import of the stanza depends completely on how the player chooses to understand 'with for to dele'; see *MED*, **delen (v) ~ with** 6a and 6b. Other verses (and especially the French games I discuss below) feature suggestive words and phrases that are never developed; no less significant because it is not finally carried through, fragmentary innuendo serves to titillate, to arouse expectation and to maintain the games' insistently sexual stakes.

[25] Green, '*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*', p. 213.

[26] D.M. Hopkin, 'Love Riddles, Couple Formation, and Local Identity in Eastern France', *Journal of Family History* 28 (2002), 339–63. I am grateful to Jeremy Goldberg for this reference.

clear-cut discrimination between the sexes and the kind of behaviour that we imagine is acceptable, differently, for each) is, at least partially, neutralized as they ultimately reinforce, so the argument goes, the sexual order that marriage encodes.

While the mixed gender group is undoubtedly the appropriate social context for *Chaunce of Dice* – and we can productively consider its role in the courtship practices of élite women and men in the fifteenth century – the case for *Ragman Roll* is rather different. The prologue, which accompanies both extant copies of the game and which lays out the fundamentals of how to play it (the narrator apologetically denying responsibility for the infelicities of 'choys' [12]), is addressed to women alone and the twenty-four characters it delineates are, likewise, exclusively female. Although Jill Mann has argued that apologies to women readers are frequently rhetorical, rather than indicative of a real audience,[27] it would be counterintuitive to assume that the address to 'ladyes' and 'maistresses echone' (1) points to anything but real women: élite and literate with an interest in, and likely some experience of, the kind of gender debate that animates the fashionable courtly poetry, including Chaucer's *Legend*, that fill both Fairfax 16 and Bodley 638. In its two extant copies, then, *Ragman Roll* identifies a 'community' of women, likely *ad hoc* and fluid and drawn together for the purposes of recreation, who occupy themselves by playing a sexually licentious and inescapably rude game. We cannot imagine, given the risqué subject-matter, that it is played in silence, free from the kind of animated talk that must necessarily give individual meaning to the often outrageous characters each woman wins. Likewise, we must logically assume that, in playing the game, the women behave in precisely the indiscreet and unruly manner – their 'disportes and other Ioyeuseie' punctuated by 'loude' laughs, 'wield' 'cheer' and 'manye wordis' – that the courtesy manuals and books of moral conduct counsel is the gateway to the devil.[28]

Communities of women, constructed around texts and productive of lively talk, have occupied serious medieval scholarship since at least the early 1990s;[29] but by far the majority of those communities have, so far, been religious rather than secular, 'talking about the things of God', as Felicity Riddy

27 Jill Mann, *Apologies to Women* (Cambridge, 1991).

28 *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, ed. T. Wright, EETS OS 33 (London, 1906), p. 128, line 29; 'How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter', in *The Babees Book*, ed. F.J. Furnivall, EETS OS 32 (London, 1868), lines 56, 58, 62.

29 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Analytical Survey: "Reading is Good Prayer": Recent Research on Female Reading Communities', *New Medieval Literatures* 5 (2002), 229–289 details the development of recent scholarship on communities of women. See Felicity Riddy, ' "Women talking about the things of God": a late medieval sub-culture', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*, ed. C. Meale (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 104–127 for her stimulating analysis of 'talk' and her valorization of 'conversation' (oral and auditory modes of exchange) as a medium of literary culture and exchange.

puts it, rather than their own libidos.[30] The most interesting work on religious communities to date has, of course, effectively demonstrated that medieval women were enormously adept at exploiting the opportunities that piety availed them as a vehicle for self-expression as well as independence and authority. This research does not take women's piety at face value, or as a simple end in itself, but as a means by which those women achieved rich and dynamic social and intellectual lives. The weight of extant evidence – the religious nature of so much of the textual material that survives from the Middle Ages – no doubt explains the predominance of the devout textual community at the expense of the secular one, but it has had, as an unintentional corollary, a prejudicial effect on how we view medieval women. The devout woman, for all of the disruption that figures like Margery Kempe evidently caused, conforms much more closely to modern expectations about medieval women than the sexually-alert, playful ones whom I am trying to chart here. That devout woman's very prominence has tended, again unintentionally, to occlude other kinds of female activity, in particular activity that, although evidently licit in some social milieux, contradicts the strict codes of sexual and amorous conduct that seek to regulate a woman's verbal indiscretions as well as her bodily ones, codes that we, in turn, tend to read too easily as social practice. The urge to homogenize or to essentialize the past and its inhabitants, often with nostalgia for an order that is absent in the present, is, as many have noticed, a common feature of historical, and especially medieval, scholarship and it often informs, I think, our understanding of real medieval women who, much more than real medieval men, are still reduced to neat, uninflected types, especially and most enduringly in terms of their amorous desire and sexual conduct. My aim here is not to deny medieval women's piety but to nuance it. Medieval women's lives, including the lives of those women for whom documentary evidence demonstrates the ownership and, in all likelihood, genuine use of devotional literature of various kinds, are inescapably, in the words of Simone de Beauvoir 'dispersed, contingent, and multiple'.[31] The kind of élite medieval women I am interested in are undoubtedly capable of, and predisposed to, both play and prayer and we must be careful not to assert an incompatibility between the secular and sacred that is far more modern than medieval.

Some work has, of course, been done on women as secular readers (although still comparatively little) and on the kinds of collectivities that are

30 The religious and devotional conversations Riddy charts are not of course wholly divorced from the obsessions of the libido. Medieval religious discourse regularly exploits the erotic register and desire – constructed in terms that moderns would identify as both straight and queer – is at the very centre of the devotional experience and its textual representations.

31 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York, 1952; Vintage edition, 1974), p. 286.

forged in particular around romance, the genre that most repeatedly addresses itself to women and that occupies a pivotal role in modern attempts to reconstruct female subjectivity and desire. Roberta Krueger, in a foundational study of the women who read, and who are encoded as readers by, Old French verse romance demonstrates the way in which the romance narrative again and again manoeuvres women out of the centre and into a complicity with the courtly ideologies that render her passive object, not active subject. But she also argues that these same narratives simultaneously 'challenge women readers to question and resist their narrative appropriation', thereby making of romance a 'discursive space' for the female 'audience's debate'.[32] Krueger's notion of a discursive space for debate, her insistence that women's desires are not easily or simply effaced by the narrative strategies (as well, I would argue, as the social ones) that seek to contain them, offers a useful point of comparison to the improvised, ludic space that a game like *Ragman Roll* provides. For all of their variety (encompassing virginity and monogamy alongside both sporadic and total sexual availability), most of the characters that the game's narrator constructs for the women players are insistently hetero-normative and inescapably the product of both dominant male discourse and wild male fantasy, whereby women are not only libidinous but available (to service men of all estates all their lives) and satisfied to boot. The fact that the prologue's narrator looks to 'Kynge Ragman' for his (and I do think it is a man) authority is not innocent. Yet, while female sexual desire is here articulated as, predominantly, a function of male desire, we cannot assume that it is not, in any way, indicative of real (medieval) women's experience; we would be hard pushed to find modern accounts of female desire, outside of self-consciously feminist thought, that are not similarly bound by the logic of male discourse and sexual categories. Nor does it mean that in articulating that desire themselves, especially in the context of a kind of 'talking' play that foregrounds conversation, improvisation, and with it debate, women do not assert their subjectivity and confound those who try to silence their desire.

A game like *Ragman Roll* that is productive of women talking, amongst themselves about their bodies and desires, in a sexually suggestive and often plainly indecorous fashion, like similarly eroticized conversational games played in mixed company, forces us to rethink our assumptions about élite women as inflexibly the passive objects of courtly desire. It demands that we acknowledge their active participation in the debate that gives life and meaning to the textual personae (secular not sacred, romance and fabliau not hagiography) that occupy so much modern scholarship, and invites us to imagine them as multi-dimensional and complex, women who do not simply

[32] Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 66, 246.

oscillate between the impossible poles of virgin and whore. These are women who are, licitly in this context (which is what makes it so interesting), active participants in their own sexualization, women who do not simply need to accept, and evidently don't, the restrictive models of conduct, especially erotic conduct, that authoritative discourse offers them. In short, in our thinking about medieval women, their 'dispersed, contingent, and multiple' lives, we ignore to our detriment, and to the impoverishment of our understanding of an elusive past and of the women who inhabited it, the evidence that some of them put their own voice, in various different and contradictory ways, as well as their little noticed appreciation for the 'saucy' side of courtly humour, right at the centre of those interminable debates about the matter of woman and her unfathomable desires.

The evidence from which I have begun to sketch out this picture of élite medieval woman at play, eluding the constraints that authoritative discourses try to impose, is of course both imperfect and limited, but it is not unique. Despite the paucity of extant English society games, the corpus of analogous material in French is both large and diverse and there is every reason to suppose that some of it, most obviously but by no means limited to that which survives in Anglo-Norman, circulated among the French-speaking élite of late medieval England. A highly satiric version of *Ragman Roll* designed for mixed company, women and men, is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86, a trilingual Worcestershire manuscript dating from the late thirteenth century and comprising texts from a remarkably wide range of genres (including *Dame Sirith* the only extant English fabliau outside of the *Canterbury Tales*).[33] The fifty quatrains that make up *Ragemon le bon* are distinguished by a barbed humour that leaves virtually no player, male or female, unscathed. The whole game is preoccupied with the failure of courtesy in women and men who are, among other things, disloyal and treacherous, faint-hearted, false and foul-mouthed, proud, lecherous and liars. My interest here lies less in the imagined conversation, personally inflected jibes or bruised egos that might have accompanied the playing of *Ragemon le Bon*, but in what it demonstrates about the limits, or lack thereof, of the ludic mode for women players. In such an explicitly playful context the women who participate in the game (or some of them at least) are not, it seems, offended by a satire that brands them or women like

[33] *Ragemon le bon* has been edited by both T. Wright, *Anecdota Litteraria* (London, 1844), pp. 76–81 and Arthur Långfors, *Un jeu de société du moyen age: 'Ragemon le bon', inspirateur d'un sermon en vers* (Helsinki, 1920). For a detailed account of Digby 86's contents and cultural milieu, see J. Tschann and M. Parkes' introduction to *Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86*, EETS SS 16 (Oxford, 1996). For a divergent account of the compiler's method see M. Corrie, 'The Compilation of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86', *Medium Aevum* 66 (1997), 236–49.

them, among other things, beautiful and whorish, bare-bummed, hard-breasted and incontinent, the kind of women whom men are desperate to fuck/kiss ('baiser' is suggestively equivocal). My point is neither to interrogate the sexual politics of this game (all players come off badly and both women and men are sexually compromised), nor to lament women's apparent complicity in a gesture that reduces them, in individual quatrains, to their sexual attributes (modern women are similarly complicit all the time), but to underline the extent to which sexually explicit, even raunchy, subject-matter, plus a tone of ironic disparagement, are a licit part of élite women's, as much as men's, entertainment.

The most popular form of text-based *jeu de société*, however, at least from surviving evidence, are the *demandes d'amour*, a form of question and answer debate between women and men on the subject of love that can be traced back at least to Andreas Capellanus in the late twelfth century, if not earlier.[34] Although the evidence for these games is predominantly French, there is at least one extant version in English, and fashionable English courtiers were evidently familiar with the form.[35] The *demandes* encompass a wide range of amorous subjects including desire, courtly conduct and sexual fantasy; they are filled with 'amerouse syghinges' (62), 'laghyng' (25), 'subtyll, coverte wordes' (25) and the palpable urge to 'doo [one's] wyll'

34 *Les Demandes d'Amour*, ed. Margaret Felberg-Levitt, Ceres Editions, Inedita & Rara 10 (Montreal, 1995) is the most complete edition of the *demandes*. Its layout and textual apparatus are undeniably cumbersome, due to the variety of, and complex relationship between, extant texts; for thoroughness, and accuracy, however it supersedes all earlier editions. *Two Late Medieval Love Treatises: Heloise's 'Art d'Amour' and a Collection of Demandes d'Amour*, ed. L.C. Brook, Medium Aevum Monographs, n.s. 16 (Oxford 1993) is a complete edition of the *demandes* in London, British Library, MS Royal 16 F II. *Amorous Games: A Critical Edition of Les Adevineaux Amoureux*, ed. J.W. Hassell, cited at the start of this essay, remains the most accurate demonstration of the wider ludic context in which the *demandes* are located. Taken from Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 654, the single largest repository of *demandes*, it includes the riddles and other question and answer games that are sandwiched in amidst the *demandes* and that are not clearly distinguished from them; Hassell also includes the text of the earliest *incunabula* editions (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Rés. Ye 93 and Rés. Ye 186) both printed by Colard Mansion and evidently derived from the Chantilly manuscript. For Andreas Capellanus' early exploitation of the *demande* form, see *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. and trans. P. Walsh (London, 1982), Book II, Chapter 7 'De variis iudiciis amoris' (various judgements on love), pp. 250–271.

35 London, British Library MS Additional 60577, the so-called Winchester anthology, contains a set of eighty-eight *demandes* that are virtually identical to those in MS Royal 16 F II with which it appears to share an archetype. The Winchester anthology is readily available in E. Wilson's facsimile edition (*The Winchester Anthology: A Facsimile of British Library Additional Manuscriot 60577* [Cambridge, 1981]) and its *demandes* have been edited by W.L. Braekman, *The 'Demaundes off Love'*, Scripta 7 (Brussels, 1982). Where possible I have cited the English *demandes*, from this edition and by page number, to demonstrate the range and tone of the native material.

(55). Some require players to puzzle through the nuances of love etiquette: 'Madame, I put [the] case', 'iij men louethe o woman' and together all three demand 'to whome she wyll holde hyr'; the woman responds by taking one 'by the fynger and streynethe the fynger', 'tredythe on tothers foote', and to the third 'she twynkelithe' her eye; 'to whome' then 'accordethe she beste'(60)?[36] Some pose more risky conundrums: 'Fayre sir', 'yf ye hadde a trewe felow' as a friend ('that louede you well and þat ye louede also') which would be preferable, that 'he toke your loue to his wyff, or that ye shuld take his' (31)?[37] Yet others are energized by a lively sense of the ludicrous: 'Faire sir', there are two sisters, 'all of oo beavte and of o wytt'; one you love 'as muche as a man may loue a woman', but 'she louethe not you'; the other 'louethe you but ye loue not hyr'; if it happened that you were all three in the water and 'ye moste nedys' drown one of them, 'whiche of them wolde ye droune' (30)?[38] The *demandes* are at once utterly conventional and deeply personal; and, like *Ragman Roll* and *Chaunce of Dice*, they invite players to replace the more restrictive teachings of the church and similar authorities with an amorous logic that, time and again, subtends an alternative code of conduct. One *demande* asks the woman player 'yf loue hadde brouȝt the louer to his loue' so that he 'hadde lyene by hyr', would 'this trespace be amendide or pardonede be reson'? The woman's initial response is 'nay' (the 'trespace ys so grete' and the 'losse' cannot be restored) but she immediately follows it with a 'neuerþelesse'; a more liberal 'pyte', that 'shulde and maye welle excuse hit', is then set against the inflexibility of a 'reson' that is, finally, at odds with the tenor of the game (61).

The most recent and thorough editor of the *demandes* has located 363 short texts, in prose and verse, extant in twenty-five manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and thirty early printed editions, from France, the Low Countries and England. The texts are remarkable for their variety and disorderly variability, evident particularly in the larger corpus of prose texts that, unlike the mnemonically rigorous verse ones, invite improvisation. The protean nature of the genre, Felberg-Levitt asserts, derives from its oral or conversational quality, susceptible to the kind of revision and variation that different players and different social situations impose.[39] The earli-

36 'Fayre sir, to hym apone whom she twynkelythe þe je. For all the je dothe, hit growethe of þe herte: she may not more subtylly make hym to knowe hit.' *'Demaundes off Loue'*, p. 60.

37 'Madame, I hadde leuer take his, for I shulde not leve to loue myne for all that; thus shulde I loue hyr, makynge mery *with* his and ther *with* I shulde euer haue hope te come to the loue of myne. So myght I be mery *with* bothe'. *'Demaundes off Loue'*, p. 31.

38 'Madame, hyr that louyde me and that I louede not. Ellys I were noo trew louer. . . .' *'Demaundes off Loue'*, p. 30

39 M. Felberg-Levitt, 'The Challenges of Editing the *Demandes d'Amours*', *Manuscripta* 36 (1992), 224–33, at p. 225.

est evidence for the *demandes* comes, however, not from these repositories of game texts but from courtly fictions, including one fabliau, in which are found the clearest accounts of how the game was played as well as its purpose as a vehicle for, as Richard F. Green puts it, 'stylized flirtation and erotic sparring'.[40] The *demandes* are suggestively perched at the intersection of fact and fiction. Attested early on in narratives about courtly society and its erotic intrigues that depict the *demandes* and their thinly veiled innuendo in action,[41] by the late fourteenth century they are, unquestionably, social commonplaces, serving as aristocratic amusements that in turn lend their debate structure and subject-matter to the courtly fictions of not only French poets like Machaut, but Chaucer. The Wife of Bath, that articulate authority on women's desires, speaks Chaucer's most memorable *demande*: 'kanst [thou] tellen me/ what thyng is it that wommen moost desiren'?

Methods for playing, or debating, the *demandes d'amour* have been detailed most recently, in all of their variety, by Felberg-Levitt.[42] The salient features of the game, especially pronounced in the prose versions, are its debate structure, dependent on verbal exchanges between women and men who are likely social intimates; its insistent erotic, comprising both innocuous questions on amorous etiquette and more risqué probings into individual comportment and, especially, sexual habit or preference; and its inherently improvisational quality, inviting players to discuss, dispute or extemporize in accordance with the demands of real social situations.[43] As Green explains, although the *demandes* are formally written out as a series of questions and answers (attributed variously to 'Dame' or 'Sire'), it is clear that they are designed neither for simple verbatim recitation, nor, despite the presence of what might be taken as a model response, with a single, uninflected answer in mind. The question (posed by a woman) 'if two men love one woman, and that woman offers her body for their pleasure in two parts, one above the waist, the other below, neither being permitted to touch the other's half, which would you choose?' elicits different responses in two different collections, and this example is not unique.[44] Likewise some *demandes* are pro-

40 Green, '*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*', p. 213.

41 For a detailed overview of references to the *demandes*, and related games, in predominantly French texts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries see Felberg-Levitt's introduction to *Les Demandes d'Amour*, especially pp. 12–29; see also Eero Ilvonen, 'Les demandes d'amour dans la littérature française du moyen âge', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 14 (1912), 128–44.

42 M. Felberg-Levitt, 'Jouer au "Demandes d'amour"', *Le Moyen français* 38 (1997), 94–124.

43 M. Felberg-Levitt offers a detailed account of the differences, in style and structure, between the prose and verse *demandes* and hypothesises about the different ways in which they might have been used; she notes in particular that the prose *demandes* more readily invite improvisation. 'Dialogues in Verse and Prose: The *Demandes d'amour*', *Le Moyen français* 29 (1991), 33–44.

44 See Green, '*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*', especially pp. 220–1. The text of the *demande* reads

vided with follow-up questions that demonstrate the extent to which repartee and improvised dialogue are a formal requirement. The importance of the *demandes d'amour* and of the riddles with which they are often paired, genres that we know circulated in élite circles in late medieval England, for my argument about the distinctive leisure activities of medieval women, is twofold. Designed, as the compiler of the first printed edition (published by Colard Mansion, c. 1479) puts it, to help the long nights of winter pass more joyfully, the *demandes* explicitly provoke talk, conversation and disputation. At the same time, they quickly betray, despite one recent editor's denial, a persistent interest in the scurrilous and rude, what that same fifteenth-century compiler characterizes, in a tongue-in-cheek apology, as 'chose un pou grasse', the 'ouvrages et devises de nuit'.[45]

As will by now be clear, élite women in England as well as on the continent, at least in a formalized ludic context, were not always constrained, in their play, by the restrictive dictates of conduct literature, authoritative, anti-feminist discourse or even the courtly fictions that seek to occlude their subjectivity and with it their desire. The surviving texts of a variety of late medieval social games, enjoyed in élite, intimate and literate circles by women and men, assembled for entertainment and perhaps also to facilitate courtship, are what Green calls the 'fossilized remains' of a social practice that, in all of its evident complexity, still eludes us.[46] Yet for all of their incompleteness, the surviving textual evidence for these games – what John Stevens might call the 'symptoms' of social activity – is enormously articulate about one community, textual as well as social, in which élite women came together with some degree of freedom and which, in its promotion of a ludic talk at once courtly and palpably discourteous, provided them with the

as follows: '*Demande*. Sire, ilz sont deux hommes qui tous deux ayment une femme, et a tous deux elle ottroie son corps et habandonne a faire toutes leurs voulentez par deux moittiés, c'est a savoir a l'un de la chainture en aval et l'autre de la chainture en amont par si que l'un ne poeult touchier a la part de l'autre. Or vous demande je laquelle part vous prendriés. *Reponse*. Dame, je prendroie de la chainture en amont pour plusieurs raisons.' Hassell, *Amorous Games*, p. 32, no. 127. The opposite response is provided by Eustache Deschamps in his *Plusieurs demandes entre les dames avec les responses sur ce*; see *Oeuvres complètes d'Eustache Deschamps*, ed. Gaston Raynaud, 11 vols (Paris 1878–1903), VIII, 112–25 (ll. 140–51); all citations are from this edition.

45 The earliest incunabula of the *demandes*, both published by Colard Mansion c. 1479, divide the game texts into two sections, each furnished with a preface that is at once explanatory and slyly apologetic. In a gesture reminiscent of Chaucer, the compiler initially advises readers (*especialement dames*) discomforted by anything dishonest or shameful (*deshonneste et vergoingneuse*) to 'turn the leaf' (*tournenent le fueillet*); the second apology, addressed exclusively to women, dismisses the cruder riddles (*chose un pou grasse*) as the labour and conversation of night-time (*c'est ouvrage et devises de nuit*). Both prefaces are edited in their entirety by Hassell, *Amorous Games*, pp. 200–201 and p. 227.

46 Green, '*Le Roi Qui Ne Ment*', p. 221.

opportunity for what Margery Kempe might have called '[un]holy dalyawns', a 'comownyng' about an insistently secular, not sacred, 'lofe'.[47] In these lively and 'unholy' conversations, we must assume that some women, as much as in the devotional conversations that they and others had, were able to assert their subjectivity, to direct and shape the animated discussions in accordance with their own interests, needs, desires.

I began this essay with a riddle, or *advineau*, about a piglet and a penis. It comes from a fifteenth-century collection of *jeux de société*, preserved in a costly, deluxe manuscript locatable to the vicinity of Ghent and Bruges and now housed in Chantilly (Musée Condé MS 654). Like many of the manuscripts in which the *demandes d'amour* are found, this one intersperses the *demandes* with no fewer than 587 riddles, many of which display a fascination, as do modern ones, with sex and bodily functions. One series of six consecutive riddles are devoted to the 'pet' (fart) and elsewhere in the collection, the compiler includes a joke analogous to the one that Chaucer uses for the denouement of the *Summoner's Tale*.[48] Despite their apparently 'low' style, many of the riddles, much like the fabliaux, exhibit a decidedly courtly logic, purposefully exploiting the kind of innuendo that enlivens a work like the *Roman de la Rose*, as well as its distinctive, metaphoric terms of reference: 'The most beautiful flower of summer, I have been so close to you, that if my *viz* (face/penis) had been enflamed, your hairs would have burned: this is said about the rose'.[49] Even more than the *demandes* then, the riddles, like the one about the cunt and the oven,[50] display their unqualified allegiance to

47 *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. S.B. Meech and H.E. Allen, EETS OS 212 (Oxford, 1940), p. 43. See Riddy, ' "Women talking about the things of God" ', p. 113 for her discussion of Margery and Julian of Norwich's 'holy dalyawns'.

48 Hassell, *Amorous Games*, p. 166, no. 722: '*Demande*. Comment partiroit on une vesse en douze parties? *Reponse*. Faittes une vesse sur le moieul d'une roe, et douze personnes ayent chascun son nez aux xii trous, et par ainsi chascun en ara sa part'; see also Roy, *Devinettes françaises du moyen âge*, p. 150, no. 465; Roy identifies the Chaucer analogue in his *Devinettes françaises du moyen âge*, p. 23 and p. 150, n. 465. The series of 'pet' riddles can be found in Hassell, pp. 97–8, nos 367–72; see also Roy, pp. 74–5, nos 109–14.

49 '*Demande*. La plus belle flour d'esté/ Je vous ay de si pres esté/ Que se mon viz fust embrasé/ Vos barbes euisse brulé. *Reponse*. Ce est dit pour un rose.' Hassell, *Amorous Games*, p. 102–3, no. 394 (see also Roy, p. 81, no. 136); for a second *Roman de la Rose* inflected *demande* see Hassell, p. 43, no. 166.

50 '*Demande*. Quelle est la chose au monde de plus contraire condition a ung con? *Reponse*. C'est ung four, car le four ne s'eschauffe sans grant feu et au contraire le con s'eschauffe par grant moisteur. Et la paste que l'en boute dedens le four molle et moiste, l'en la retire assez tost dure et seche, et du con il advient tout le contraire, car ce que l'en y boute par coustume est dur et roide, et quant il s'en retire l'en le treuve tout mol et moiste.' Hassell, *Amorous Games*, p. 155, no. 657.

the world of the fabliaux, a genre whose popularity with women is only just beginning to be considered.

Carter Revard, in a recent article on French fabliau manuscripts and British Library, MS Harley 2253 (a volume that is fully entrenched in the 'matter of woman' debate), traces, predominantly in a series of engaging footnotes, the 'reading tastes of courtly ladies'.[51] These, he demonstrates, are characterized by a predilection for 'notably raunchy' beast-epic, burlesque, and various fabliaux. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 19152 (dated c. 1300), for instance, was by the mid fifteenth century in the hands of an aristocratic woman in south-east France; it is one of the most important extant repositories of French fabliaux, containing no less than twelve. Harley 2253 (dated c. 1340), which contains five fabliaux, was probably compiled for an aristocratic Englishwoman and her family (there are various textual signals to suggest a female audience) and Joan Mortimer Talbot (with her son Sir John Talbot) is posited as a likely candidate. Significantly, the manuscript includes an *ABC à femmes* designed, according to its opening lines, to help the literate women teach others to read ('Je froi a femmes vn a.b.c./ a l'escole si eles vueillent aler; / Cele qui sunt lettree / as autres purront recorder'; 'I shall make for women an ABC, if they want to go to school; those who are literate can read it to the others').[52] In his detailing of evidence for women's ownership of, or documented connection with, composite anthologies containing texts that are variously 'courtly, scabrous, religious, amorous, political, exotic', Revard convincingly demonstrates the extent to which the women associated with them are 'active auditors' of the 'naughty' as much as the 'nice'.[53] Likewise, new work by Brian Levy points to the way in which the fabliaux themselves, at times, address explicitly the female members of the audience in ways that, by now, should come as no surprise. *La Demoisele qui sonjoit* concludes with the image of a woman mounting her exhausted lover ('there's no shame in a woman riding a man when he's not up to it') while urging the female auditors to have 'vigorously sexy' dreams; and the narrator of *Le Pescheor de Pont seur Seine* interjects his account of the wife's

51 Carter Revard, 'From French "Fabliau Manuscripts" and MS Harley 2253 to the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*', *Medium Aevum* 69 (2000), 261–78, see especially pp. 267, 276–7, nn. 30 and 31; *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, 2000) provides the most up-to-date discussion of Harley 2253 and its social context.

52 For a discussion of the women associated with Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 19152 and Harley 2253 see Revard, 'French "Fabliau Manuscripts"', p. 267 and p. 277, n. 31, respectively; Revard's account of the *ABC à femmes* (and his translation of its opening lines) can also be found on p. 277. For further discussion of the Harley 2253 fabliaux see B. Nolan, 'Anthologizing Ribaldry: Five Anglo-Norman Fabliaux', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, pp. 289–327.

53 Revard, 'French "Fabliau Manuscripts"', pp. 276–7.

preference for her husband's genitals above all else with a mock apology to the women in the audience.[54]

In the first printed edition of the *jeux de société*, the compiler prefaces his collection of riddles with a short prologue addressed to women, 'dames' and 'demoiselles'. He presents himself as an old man, once much appreciated by women, now worn by the ravages of age, who was accustomed in his youth to the kind of élite social gatherings in which the various games, including the recitation of riddles, were played. Although the narrator and the personal authority he lends the compilation are no doubt pure fiction, what is interesting is the way that the prologue constructs a distinctive past ('mon temps' as distinct from the 'temps present'), a time and place sketched with palpable nostalgia, in which these ludic pastimes and their players can be located.[55] The popularization of these society games which printing affects (and with a second edition published by Mansion in 1479 their popularity cannot be doubted) at once removes them from the social milieu which gave them their original meaning and simultaneously requires a reconstruction of that milieu in order to render them fashionable for the aspirant tastes of the new bourgeois reader. Like the English games of amorous divination which are found in a manuscript roughly contemporary with Mansion's first printed edition (Bodley 638), the *demandes* and *adevineaux* seem to function, by the end of the Middle Ages, as a self-conscious and likely performative means of self-identification with a fashionable, aristocratic lifestyle and the ludic tastes, especially women's, that animated it.

I want, in conclusion, to think again very briefly about what all these society games, French, English, and played expressly, even insistently, by women, can tell us about the reception of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. As Green asserts in his account of the *familia Cupidinis* and the informal *cour amoreuse* 'that sprang into being whenever members of the *familia regis* fell to discussing love poetry' – and as others after him commonly acknowledge – the *Legend* is a poem that situates itself explicitly in the Ricardian court as a ludic interlude.[56] References to Anne of Bohemia, the royal palaces of Eltham and Sheen (which Richard had recently renovated to accommodate rooms for dancing), courtly flower and leaf debates, and the sly invocations to 'ye wemen' (2559) and 'us men' (920), suggest an intimate ambience, 'the presence' as Green puts it 'of a tight group of initiates playing with literary and social conventions'.[57] There is no doubt that the literate, sophisticated,

[54] Brian J. Levy, 'Performing Fabliaux', in *Performing Medieval Narrative*, ed. Evelyn Birge Vitz, Nancy Freeman Regalado and Marilyn Lawrence (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 123–140, especially p. 135; I am grateful to the editors of this volume for generously allowing me pre-publication access to this article.

[55] Hassell, *Amorous Games*, p. 227.

[56] Green, 'The *Familia Regis*', p. 106.

[57] Green, 'The *Familia Regis*', p. 106.

and above all fashionable women who are among these 'initiates' were well versed in the kind of courtly play I have been documenting here; and it would be odd, I think, to assume that they did not bring their ludic education to bear on a performance, or private recitation, of the *Legend*. Florence Percival, citing David Burnley, has already argued that, once we are attuned to the kind of innuendo inherent in words like 'pitee', 'compassioun', 'mercy', and 'routhe' (words which 'in actuality' mean women's 'sexual compliance'), it becomes hard to read the *Legend* in a 'tragic or pathetic register'.[58] Indeed, read side by side with games like *Ragman Roll* or many of the *demandes d'amour*, even the kind of outrageous sexual punning that Sheila Delany, in her account of the *Legend*'s 'logic of obscenity', finds in all but one pitiful life seems commonplace.[59]

If Philippa of Lancaster is the conduit through whom Deschamps' ballade 765 reached Chaucer (the ballade dedicated to Philippa which is credited with initiating the flower and leaf tradition in England and with it the *Legend*), as Joyce Coleman argues elsewhere in this volume, she may well have alerted him, as well as her cousin-in-law and Garter-sister Anne, to another of Deschamps' playful verses, *Plusieurs demandes entre les dames avec les responses sur ce*. Deschamps' contribution to the *demandes d'amour* is less remarkable for its elegant versification than for the persistence of his sexually-charged wit which finds men transformed into lice, hiding between women's legs, and keen-eyed lady shoppers rejecting preserved herrings in favour of 'les bons vis gros' (at once 'good, big, live ones' and 'good, big penises').[60] Late medieval society games, among which we would do well to include the *Legend*, reflect and, in turn, promote an explicitly playful attitude to sexuality that forcefully resists moralization; any attempt to impose a moral reading is from the start established not simply as the sour grapes of celibate (or not so celibate) clerics, but generically, as well as tonally, wholly inappropriate. Much work still needs to be done on these seductive pastimes and what they can tell us about the women who played them. But one thing is clear: they serve as a reminder that we need to treat medieval women, even élite ones for whom we have documented evidence of their piety, with a little less reverence and a bit more levity. Anne of Bohemia, after all, may well have known, long before we did, the difference between a piglet and a penis.

58 D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosopher's Tradition* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 34; cited by Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary*, p. 308, n. 12.

59 Sheila Delany, 'The logic of obscenity', in *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley, 1994), pp. 137–52.

60 The fifth of Deschamps' *Plusieurs demandes* (ll. 37–44) asks the lover where he would hide if, transformed into a louse, he were dismissed by his lady; he replies that 'tous nus' he would hide 'entre les jammes'; the twenty-first (ll. 190–7) poses the market dilemma: faced with a merchant who sells fresh, salted, cured, as well as plump, preserved herrings, which will the lady buy, the preserved ones or *les bons vis gros* (both 'good, big, live ones' and 'good, big penises'). She buys of course *les bons vis gros*.

Index

Abelard, Peter 139
Alceste ix–x, 8, 67–9, 75, 77–8, 81, 95, 118, 122–6, 133, 140, 149–53, 161–2
  and Amazon theme 103
  and Anne of Bohemia 67, 78–9
  and daisy topos 125
  and G Prologue 67, 68, 69, 79
  and game 122–3
  and good lordship 80
  and Theban theme 95–6
  and tyranny 75, 77
  eloquence of 78–9
  ethical value of her sacrifice 152–3
Allen, Judson B 110
Amazons 85–6, 93, 96–7, 103, 104
Anderson, David 91
Anjou, Margaret of 98
Anne of Bohemia 50–1, 54, 67, 78–9, 101–3, 196–7
Antony 127
Ariadne 91, 145
Assay 137–8
  of intention 140
  of virtue 155
Audience 4
Augustine, Saint
  on Lucrece 141–4
  De Trinitate 168–9
  on virtue 145, 146
  Retractations 168–9
Authorial intent 161–2, 169
Authorship
  duplex causa efficiens 166–9, 174

Bell, Susan Groag 34, 49
Benson, C. David 95
Benson, Larry D. 28
Blamires, Alcuin 111
Boccaccio, Giovanni
  on Alceste 152–3
  on Lucrece 153–4
  De Claris Mulieribus xi, 119
  Genealogy of the Pagan Gods 169
Boffey, Julia 13
Books 124
Borroff, Marie 59
Bradshaw, Henry 26
Brown, Peter 63
Burley, Simon 78–9
Burnley, J.D. 71, 79

Canterbury Tales
  and *Prologue* to *Legend of Good Women* 159, 162, 163
  'Clerk's Tale' 75
  critical reception of 163–66
  'Knight's Tale' 84, 88–91, 96–7, 104
  'Manciple's Tale' 158
  'Merchant's Tale' 75
  'Retraction' 158, 163–6, 175
Carruthers, Mary 109–10
Chance of Dice 177, 178, 180, 181, 184, 191
  and Chaucer 182
Chaucer, Geoffrey
  and authorial identity 171
  and authorship 146, 159, 160, 168–70, 172
  and *Ballade* 765 52–3
  and narrative 130
  and Ovid 147
  as father to his works 173
  Gentilesse 76
  House of Fame 136–7
  Lak of Stedfastnesse 68
  narrative persona in G Prologue 70
  on classical and Christian ethics 145
  reading aloud 10
  use of Augustine 143, 144–6
Classical and Christian virtue 132–156 *passim*
Cleopatra 81, 86, 126–8, 147, 154
Clifford, Lewis 53–4
Coleman, Joyce 197
Collette, Carolyn 36
delle Colonne, Guido, *see* Hipsyple and Medea
Communities of women *see* Women

Concordia 102–3
Conduct, elite female 183, 184, 189
Constancy as heroic female idea 129
Corson, Hiram 25
Court culture
  Anglo-French 181
  olde stories and court politics 90
  Ricardian 54–5, 72–5
  see also Walsingham
Courtney, William, Archbishop of Canterbury 72, 76
Cowen, Janet 13, 30–31
Cultural memory *see* Memory
Cupid 60–66, 70–1, 79–81, 133, 139–40
  and Richard II 71
  see also God of Love

Daisy 67, 70–1, 73, 121, 124–5
Dante Alighieri 134–8, 155
David, Alfred 123–4
Delany, Sheila 1, 140–1, 143, 157
Demandes d'amour 179, 190–3
La Demoiselle qui sonjoit 195
Demophon 91
Deschamps, Eustache xii, 33, 197
  Ballade 285 53
  Ballade 765 33, 39, 43, 56–8
  flower and leaf topos 33, 49–55
  Isabeau of Bavaria 43
  Lay de franchise 51–3
Dido 128, 147–8, 154–5
  and Emelye 87
Dinshaw, Carolyn 95–6, 179
Donaldson, E. Talbot 30
Dreamwork, *see* Ricardian Dreamwork

Eberle, Patricia J. 71
Edwards, A.S.G. 2, 28, 30
Edwards, Robert 119
Emelye 87, 96–7
Epistre au Roi Richart see Philippe de Mézières
Ethics and literary texts 134

F Prologue *see Legend of Good Women*
Fabliau
  and female audience 195
Federico, Sylvia 90–1
Felberg-Levitt, M. 191–2
le Fèvre, Jehan 113
Fidelity 66, 70, 71
Flower and Leaf topos 33, 44, 51, 122
  in Gower's work 53
Foucault, Michel 157
Fradenburg, L.O. Aranye 71,78, 150–1
Frank, Robert Worth, Jr. 1, 125, 135–6, 142
Freud, Sigmund 61
  and Marx 62
Froissart, Jean vii
Furnivall, Frederick J. 26–7

G Prologue *see Legend of Good Women*
Gambera, Disa 93
Game theory 106–108
Games
  and ethical testing 107
  and ethical training 109–110
  erotic games 176–77, 183–6, 189
  literary games 106–7, 110, 113; *see also* memory
  women and games 178–97 *passim*
Ganim, John 1
Garter Sorority 36–7
Gaunt, John of 33–47 *passim*, 73
  household 35
  children 35
  Household Register 36
  negotiating children's marriages 45
  negotiating Philippa of Lancaster's marriage 37–8, 45–7
  strained relations with Richard II 52
God of Love 118, 126, 160, 174; *see also* Cupid
Gottlieb, Beatrice 111
Gower, John 34–5, 53
  and *Ballade* 765 53
  Confessio Amantis 48–9, 51, 60, 71–2, 136, 137–8
  Vox Clamantis 168
  women's speech 9
Green, Richard Firth 185, 192, 193, 196
Griselda xi, 98–9

Haas, Renate 170
Hagiography 140–1
Hanrahan, Michael 66–7, 98
Havely, N.R. 130
Hippolyta 96
Hipsipyle *see* Hypsipyle
Homo Ludens see Huizinga
House of Fame see Chaucer
Huizinga, Johan
  game theory 107–8

Hypermnestra 81, 86
Hypsipyle 81, 92–3, 145, 147
  and Medea 88, 92, 103
  and the 'Knight's Tale' 92
  Chaucer's sources for 92, 93

Integrity 132–56 *passim*
Intention 132, 139, 140, 148, 152
Intercession 96, 104
  queens and 61, 78
Isabeau of Bavaria 42–45; *see also* Deschamps
Isabella of France 99–100
  marriage to Richard II 100

Jauss, Hans Robert xvii–xviii
João, King of Portugal 47
St. Jerome 119
Jeux de Société 180, 190, 194,196
John of Gaunt *see* Gaunt, John of
Jugement du roy de behaingne see Machaut

Kane, George 13, 30–1
Kempe, Margery 194
Kiser, Lisa 1, 158
Kittredge, George Lyman 49–50
The Knight's Tale see Chaucer
Knighton, Henry
  Chronicle 74, 76–7
Kooijman, Jacques 53
Krueger, Roberta 188

Lancaster, Philippa of 33–55 *passim*, 197
  and *Ballade 765* 44, 49, 52, 54
  cultural ambassador 47–8
  failed marriage negotiations 37–43
  Flower and Leaf topos 33, 49
  Garter Sorority 36–7
  literary influence 34, 52, 55
  literary patronage 48, 50, 55
  proposed marriage to Charles VI of France 42
  Queen of Portugal 34, 47–8
  reputation for piety and goodness 47
Lancastrian political culture 98
Legend of Good Women
  advice to Richard II 104
  and Anne of Bohemia 50–1
  audience 178
  Balade in G Prologue 67
  and *The Canterbury Tales* 136
  'The Knight's Tale' 84, 88–91
  'Retraction' 158–9, 161–2
  and Dante's *Divine Comedy* 135–6
  and debate about women 117–19, 123
  and Troilus 65–6, 70, 120, 146; 157–75 *passim*; *see also Troilus and Criseyde*
  as palinode 120, 157–75 *passim*
  critical history vii–xi, 1–2
  editing history 2
  literary game 120–2, 130
  manuscript context 177–8
  manuscripts of 13–22, 30, 176, 196
  narrative voice in 120–1, 146–7
  print history 22–32
  Prologue(s) 26–7, 61, 64–9, 70, 76, 79, 120–4, 134
  reader response 118–19, 123, 124, 131
  Thebes and Troy 83–96
  on virtue and suffering 146
Literature
  and ethical history 136
  and judgment 134
Love 60
  political discourse of 76–7
Lowes, John Livingstone vii, 43
Lucrece 128–9, 141–4, 147
Lynch, Kathryn 128

Machaut, Guillaume de
  Jugement du roy de behaingne 68, 113
  Jugement dou roy de navarre 113
Maidstone, Richard of
  Concordia 102–3
Mansion, Colard 193, 196
Manuscripts
  British Library Additional MS. 9832 66
  British Library Additional MS. 12524 14
  British Library MS. Harley 2253 195
  Cambridge, Magdalene College MS. Pepys 2006 19
  Cambridge, Trinity College MS. R.3.19 20–2, 66
  Cambridge, University MS. Ff.1.6 (Findern) 14, 16–17
  Cambridge University MS. Gg 4.27 17–19

Paris, Musée Condé MS. 654 194
Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Arch Selden B 24 19–20
Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Bodley 638 14–15, 176, 186, 196
Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Digby 86 176, 189
Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Fairfax 16 15–16, 176, 186
Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Tanner 346 20, 30
Paris, Bibliothéque Nationale MS. fr. 19152 195
Manuscripts and performance 14
Marguerite *see* Daisy
Martin, G. H. 63
Masculine identity 98
Mathew, Gervase 54, 73
McDonald, Nicola 36–7
Medea xii, 81, 88, 92–5, 139; *see also* Hypsipyle
Melibee x
Memory 105–10, 132, 136–7
books and memory 124–6
cheste and memory 125
cultural memory 105–31 *passim*
daisy and memory 124–5
ethically trained 109
literary game and 106–7, 110
selective 116–17
de Mézières, Philippe de 98–9
Epistre au Roi Richart 98–9
Middleton, Anne 171
Minnis, Alistair 115, 129, 130, 168
Moi, Toril 115

Narratorial self-representation 147

Obermeier, A. 158
olde stories and Ricardian politics 90
Olson, Paul 88
Oral performance theory 11–12
Orders of the Flower and Leaf 44
Ovid 119
Heroides 119, 147

Palinode 157, 158, 166
Patterson, Lee 88–9
Payne, Robert O. 1
Pearsall, Derek 21, 59
Pelias 94
Pelles *see* Pelias
Percival, Florence 89, 105, 106, 125, 158, 180, 197
Performance, 3–4, 5, 8–9, 12, 64
Le Pescheor de Pont seur Seine 195–6
Phaedra 91
Phillips, Helen 60, 71, 79, 130
Philomela 81–2, 138
Phyllis 91, 144–5, 154
de Pizan, Christine xi
Plato
Symposium 153
Play *see* Games, Game Theory
Pollard, A.W. 28
Procne 82, 86
Prologues *see Legend of Good Women*
Public virtue 132

Queens, power of 104
foreign queens 98, 100
see also David Wallace
Queenship in *The Legend* 96
querelle de la rose see Woman Debate

Ragemon le bon 189
Ragman Roll 177–89, 191
Renoun 132
Retraction *see Canterbury Tales*
Revard, Carter 195
Ricardian court culture *see* Court Culture
Ricardian Dreamwork 59–65, 73, 81–2
Richard II 54
and Parliament 73–4, 77
deposition of 75
marriages 99–100
politics of 98
rex iratus 71–4
Richard the Redeless 72
Riddles 194; *see also jeux de société*
Rising of 1381 72
Riverside Chaucer 28–30
Robertson, D.W. 100
Roman de la rose 65–6, 119, 194
Rowe, Donald 117

Saul, Nigel 74, 75, 78, 100
Schlauch, Margaret
on Chaucer's interest in tyranny 75
Schwarz, Kathryn 97
Scogan, Henry 76
Seymour, M.C. 64
Shaner, M.C.E. 2, 28, 30
Simpson, James 79, 81

Skeat, W.W. 27
Spearing, A.C. 173
Stafford, Edmund, Bishop of Exeter 74
Staley, Lynn 97
Stevens, John 181, 193
Strohm, Paul 78, 100
Suffering
  and patience 144
  as a virtue 144–6
Sutton-Smith, Brian 106
Swynford, Katherine 35, 45

Tereus 149
Thebes and Troy 83–4, 90–1
Theseus 91–2
Thisbe 86
Thynne, William 23–4
Translation 161–2
Troilus and Criseyde 83, 119; *see also* *Legend of Good Women*
  classical and Christian virtues in 146
  narrator of 146
  palinodic conclusion of 167
  and G Prologue to *Legend of Good Women* 65
Troy
  and Anne of Bohemia 102
  and Ricardian politics 102–3
Truth 133–4
Turner, Victor 108–9, 131
Two Noble Kinsmen 97; *see also* Amazons
Tyranny 75–6
  and queenly intercession 78
  Chaucer's interest in 72, 76
  Lombard tyrants 79–80
  remedy for 77

Urry, John 25
Usk, Adam 72
Usk, Thomas 67
Utley, Francis Lee 180

Virtue
  and secrecy 148
  perception of 147–8, 153–4
  public performance of 138, 147–8, 150–1
Vita Ricardi Secundi 72

Wallace, David 69, 85
  on power of queens 78; *see also* queens
Walsingham, Thomas 54–5, 63, 72, 79
  on court of Richard II 54–5
Westminster Chronicle 72
Winnicott, Donald 108
Woman Debate 105, 112
  Chaucer's conflation of categories 118
  cultural and literary game 110–13
  pro and con positions 114–15
  querrelle des femmes 113
  rules of 114
Womanhede x–xi
Women 81–2
  and *olde stories* 84
  and secular reading habits 179, 180, 186, 188
  readers of *Legend of Good Women* 179
  reading communities of diverse tastes 186–9
    recent scholarship of 186–7
  reputed piety of 187
Worthen, W.B. 12
Wright, Constant S. 25
Wyfhod x

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